

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1864.—VOL. LXIV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 23, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



SEEING POLYDOR'S ACTION, HELEN SPRUNG FORWARD AND FLUNG HERSELF UPON BERNARD'S BREAST.

THE LADY HELEN.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"My dear Helen, the new governess has arrived, and she is a disappointment," said Lady Barstowe, glancing up at the tall girl who had just entered the room.

"A disappointment? Oh, I am so sorry; but in what way?"

"She is far too young and pretty; she stated she was twenty-one; she looks barely seventeen."

"Youth and beauty are usually regarded as good gifts," smiled Lady Helen Carstairs, "and I for one like looking at women better favoured than myself."

"Beauty is only skin deep," said her aunt, "and another old proverb runs—'Handsome is as handsome does'; but men (especially young men) seldom remember this; I positively tremble for the peace of Barstowe."

"You think Miss Swannell may follow the

example of the Lady of Troy; but really, auntie, that is distinctly unfair. Because a woman is pretty she need neither be coquettish nor wicked. For my own part I am glad the governess is a beauty, and young; there is more chance that she will sway the children through their affections. Now you will excuse me, dear, as I am late, and uncle does not like dinner to be delayed."

She hurried away to make the demi-toilet which at Barstowe Hall was considered sufficient when the family dined alone, and Lady Barstowe sighed as the door closed behind.

"Never a dearer or better girl breathed than our Helen," she thought; "any man should be proud of such a prize—but I wish Heaven had been pleased to dower her with greater comeliness, for Bernard is a beauty lover, and this girl, Cora Swannell, is just the type he most admires. I am afraid for Helen and for him; still he is bound to her, and he is an honourable gentleman."

"The Lady Helen," as the villagers termed her lovingly, "quickly completed her toilet, which was simple in the extreme; she wore a black silk dress cut square at the throat, with sleeves

descending to the elbow, relieved both at neck and arms by falling white lace of exquisite fineness. The skirt was long and perfectly plain, displaying to advantage Helen's beautiful figure. She, herself, was not beautiful; the pale face was high-bred and refined, but it did not boast a single regular feature; the nose was of a nondescript shape, the mouth a trifle too wide, the chin inclined to heaviness. The dark eyes were not remarkable for size or brilliancy, yet they proved the greatest attraction of the plain but pleasant face, they were so tender and true, so full of love and kindness that they drew hearts towards their owner with a marvellous power.

Helen's brow was broad and low, with smooth dark hair drawn loosely back from it, and on that brow purity and peace were "throned serene."

With scarcely a second glance at herself she left her apartment, coming full tilt upon a slight figure robed in palest blue.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, smiling and offering her hand, "I had no idea of colliding with you, Miss Swannell. You are wondering who I am. Well, let me introduce myself as Sir

John Barstowe's niece, Helen Carstairs. There is the gong, we must make haste to get our seats before Sir John appears."

"I lost my way," said a pretty plaintive voice, "I suppose I took a wrong turning."

"The corridors are confusing," then as they walked side by side, Helen looked with frank admiration at her companion, who was such an utter contrast to herself. "What a child you are!" she exclaimed in her pleasant, unaffected voice, "and how very pretty; almost I am tempted to envy you."

A slight blush rose to the girl's face; it was not often women accorded her such homage, yet she was undoubtedly attractive. Petite in face and figure, "divinely fair," with large limpid blue eyes, looking innocently from beneath dark brows and lashes; a small mouth, curved like Cupid's bow, and a mass of curly yellow hair—that was Cora Swannell. She had little appealing ways, which reminded one of a pretty timid child, and her voice was sweet as a bird's when she lifted it in song.

She was very demure and shy that first evening, scarcely lifting her eyes from her plate, answering any remark addressed to her in a low tone, and a little timid upward glance. She impressed Sir John favourably, so that when she retired, he said,—

"A nice little girl, my dear, a thought too young, perhaps, but our children are not difficult to govern—she is quite a beauty too."

"Too much so," remarked her ladyship, stealing an anxious glance at Bernard, who had been quite silent on the subject of Cora's looks; his mother thought that silence ominous, but Helen was so frank in her praise, so evidently undisturbed by Cora's superior charms that she tried to believe all would be well.

In the morning Miss Swannell settled down to her duties in a way which proved she had had some experience in tuition.

There were three girls in the schoolroom; Rhea, fourteen; Mimi, twelve; and Dulcie, seven. The two younger girls were as childish as their years; but Rhea was grave and composed as a woman; she was clever too, and Cora did not feel quite free from embarrassment under the regard of the thoughtful dark eyes which were so like Helen's in form and colour.

With Mimi she was quickly on friendliest terms, so that when the morning walk was taken, her second pupil walked with her, whilst Rhea, with Dulcie, preceded them.

"What a happy home yours appears to be!" said Cora, as the child clung to her arm, "and what a change from the grinding routine of school!"

"Yes, we are jolly people, rather," admitted Mimi, who dearly loved the sound of her own prattle, "and we mean to make you so comfortable that you won't wish to leave us until you are married. Miss Lester, our last governess stayed with us until her wedding-day. She married a missionary and went out to Africa. I wouldn't want to be her. I don't like negroes, and I don't like missionaries."

"I am afraid you are a very unorthodox young lady."

"That is what Bernard says. He vows I ought to have been a boy. I wish I were one, what fun I'd have. Did you teach in a school, Miss Swannell?"

"Yes, ever since I was fifteen; it was dreary work," with a little sigh; "but there was no help for it. Up to that time I had been a parlour boarder. Then papa lost almost all his money, and things changed for me."

"Oh, how sorry I am! yet, if you were rich, we shouldn't have you for a governess, and that would be a pity; you are so nice and pretty. Is your poor papa alive? and where is your home, Miss Swannell? Oh, please don't think me rude or tell Rhea how many questions I ask. I am not inquisitive, but I do like to know all about people I care for."

Cora smiled.

"So you care for me already? Well that is a good beginning, and I am not at all vexed with you for being interested in my affairs. My papa is living abroad because that is cheaper. He is a proud man, and could not endure to meet those

who had known him in his prosperous days. He has no settled home, so that we do not often meet, which is a great grief to us because we love each other dearly."

"I shall ask papa to invite him here," said Mimi, promptly, "you would like that, wouldn't you, dear?"

"You have a kind heart, little Mimi; and although it is unlikely Sir John should ever extend his hospitality to my father I thank you just the same. I feel sure we are going to be the best of friends. I want you to love me as dearly as you seem to love Miss Carstairs."

"Helen! oh yes, she is very kind; but she is Lady not Miss Helen. She has always lived with us since uncle died, and is going to marry Bernard."

Cora gave a little start; then she said,—

"I suppose they love each other very fondly."

"I don't know," indifferently. "Of course Bernard likes Helen, and she is very fond of him; but they didn't choose each other. Uncle and father arranged all that ever so long ago."

She had spoken more loudly than she thought, and her words reached Rhea, who, turning sharply, said,—

"Mimi, you should not discuss family affairs with a stranger. Mamma would not like it," and she shot a decidedly rebukeful look at the governess, who flushed scarlet.

"I am afraid I have been imprudent to let you chatter so much," she said; but the fireproof one broke out. "Why should I not tell you what everybody knows, and I haven't said any harm, only Rhea is so starchy. I am glad you will be here to the wedding. We shall have such fun. It is to be on the first of September, so we have only five months to wait. I wish Helen was prettier. All brides ought to be lovely."

She did not continue her confidences, because Rhea, dropping into the rear, said,—

"Take Dulcie, and I will walk with Miss Swannell. I am sure you are bothering her with your chatter;" and there was nothing for Mimi but to obey her resolute sister.

The remainder of the walk was quiet enough, conversation fast languishing then utterly dying out, so that Cora was glad when they reached home.

Gaining her room she threw aside her hat with an angry gesture.

"The little prig!" she muttered through her pretty white teeth. "I'll be even with her yet. I never forgive or forget an insult." She stood with her pretty brows puckered into a frown, the line of her mouth sharply curved. Then thrusting the yellow curls back from her babyish brow she laughed softly. "How stupid to be so easily vexed," she said, and sauntered away to the schoolroom, which was quite deserted.

Above the mantel hung a portrait of Helen—Rhea's property—before this stood Cora, minutely examining and cruelly criticising every feature. Presently she spoke. "So you will marry Bernard Barstowe—perhaps. Fate, in the form of Cora Swannell, may have something to say to that. You are too presumptuous, my dear, and too covetous. You have birth, position, riches; I have only beauty, and that I pit against your advantages. I do not think *Le Beau Cousin* is for you; but we shall see!"

She was very sweet and kindly throughout the day to Mimi. The child might be of use to her, was already her friend and champion, and in her simplicity would divulge the whole family history and fortune if judiciously played upon. To Rhea she displayed a gentle consideration, a "I forgive-you-freely style," which that young lady hotly resented; but which she could not comment upon. But she said to Helen,—

"I dislike Miss Swannell more than I can tell; worse than ever when she purrs. She isn't real in any way."

"What do you mean, dear? Don't you think you are just a wee bit too confident in your own judgment, and very uncharitable?"

"I am neither," answered Rhea, promptly, "as you will learn some day. We are not all like you, Helen. We should be better if we were, and I still insist that Cora Swannell is false in nature, superficial in education."

CHAPTER II.

THE first Sunday at church proved a signal success for Cora. As her pretty face appeared in Sir John's pew more than one young fellow felt his heart beat a thought faster with admiration.

There was a scarcity of beauty at Barstowe and the surrounding villages, so that the new governess proved doubly attractive.

Then, as the pure sweet voice rose in joyous music, both Rector and Curate turned towards her with a look of interest. What an acquisition she would be to the extremely poor choir! Would it be possible to win her to such work?

Straightway the Rector resolved to approach Sir John on the subject; perhaps he would use his influence with this beautiful girl!

The ladies shook their heads doubtfully as they gossiped on their homeward way.

"The governess was far too pretty; she made dear Lady Helen look positively plain; and, after all, Bernard was but a man, and might be tempted from his allegiance."

The next Sunday Miss Swannell took her place in the choir; and as she sang, with her great blue eyes uplifted in cherubic fashion, her admirers declared she most resembled an angel. But Rhea said, scoffingly,—

"Yes, the angels one sees on Christmas cards, with eyes twice the size of their mouths! Pook! she is a sham, and I hate shams of any kind."

No one asked Bernard's opinion of the girl; perhaps at this time he could not have given it. He knew she was beautiful, that her beauty stirred him strangely; but that was natural, seeing he had an artistic temperament. Yet why, as the days went by, did he tell himself so often that "Helen was a dear good girl; that he was a fortunate fellow to have won her!"

Deep down in his heart there was already a vague doubt that he did not hold her quite so dear as he ought, considering the relationship between them; but, man like, he tried to stifle it. He played round and about it, driving off the moment when he must face and fight it. He seldom saw Cora alone, but that only aggravated affairs.

Anxiously he waited each lunch or dinner hour; how anxiously he hardly knew. He began to take particular notice of and interest in her dainty toilets; to watch every change of her expressive face; to burn with jealous rage when he met Mr. Humphry (the Curate) walking with her, or saw him gazing intently at her in church. Once he said to her,—

"You are like all girls in one particular."

"And that, Mr. Bernard!" with a shy, upward glance at him.

"You are dearly devoted to the clergy."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true; you do not deny it; and you let Humphry monopolise you."

"Don't you mean *victimise*?" she questioned, with a pretty laugh. "Really he bores me so dreadfully at times with his parish gossip that I can hardly refrain from snubbing him. I suppose," reflectively, "if I were good, like dear Lady Helen, I should be intensely interested; but I am an everyday, pleasure-loving, selfish little mortal!"

"I am sure you are not selfish," he began, when, looking up, he confronted Rhea's extremely critical and disdainful eyes.

"Bernard, have you forgotten that the horses are at the door, and Helen is waiting?" she said, with a significant glance at Cora, who instantly slipped away.

"I wish you would trouble your head about your own affairs," the young man snapped. "I have been cooling my heels these twenty minutes whilst Helen dressed. Poo my word, Rhea, Mimi has fifty times your courtesy."

"Mimi is very fond of Miss Swannell," retorted the young lady, as she fled, leaving her brother to digest her words.

He felt angry and uneasy. It was difficult to converse with the girl who rode by his side. It was the one accomplishment in which Helen excelled, and she looked splendid in the saddle; but he was wondering all the while how Cora would appear in like circumstances; conjuring

up the vision of a fair face flushed into added beauty with the unwonted exercise; the pretty lips a little parted, showing a glimpse of small white teeth, the great limpid eyes all aglow with happiness and excitement, the soft curling hair just loosened about the dainty cheeks and slender throat.

Then how pleasant to hear the babble of that liquid voice, whose sweetness was in no way marred by the faint suspicion of a lip! He started guiltily when Helen suddenly addressed him.

"Are not you well, dear? You have been so quiet of late, and you look as though you had the affairs of the nation upon your shoulders. What is the trouble?"

He laughed in a half-hearted fashion. "There is no trouble; but the truth is, Nell, I am sick of my aimless life. When we are married" (he spoke the words bravely) "you shall teach me how to make it nobler, fuller; at present I am like to die of ennui."

Her true eyes brightened. "You feel that life was not meant to be all play. Oh, Bernard, it is good to arrive at such knowledge—with you to help me, to guide me, what a vast deal may be accomplished."

He was touched by her words; leaning towards her he possessed himself of one shapely hand.

"Helen, I wish I were a better fellow for your sake."

"Suppose" (with an arch look) "I prefer you as you are with all your faults and imperfections on your head! Oh, Bernard, I would not have you changed in any one thing from the Bernard I have always known—and loved," the last words were whispered, and as she spoke them the rich colour mounted to her usually pale cheeks, her eyes were full of a shy gladness.

"You hold me in too high esteem, sweetheart," he said; "but, please Heaven, you shall never regret giving yourself to me," and in his heart he was praying, "May my hand be the last to wound her, may Heaven in its mercy keep me loyal in thought and deed!"

It was a pity when he was so full of gentleness towards her, so earnest in his desire to abide by that old contract, that he should chance upon Cora. He was coming downstairs, when his steps were arrested by the sound of low sobbing. Thinking that Mimi or Dulcie had fallen into disgrace, he pushed open the door, to see a pretty head bowed upon folded arms, a slender little figure shaken with emotion. His thoughts flew to Rhea, and advancing quickly, he said,—

"Miss Swannell, Miss Swannell, what is it?" She uttered a low cry as she started to her feet; he saw that she grasped a paper in one hand, whilst with the other she shaded her eyes.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" she murmured. "I—I did not hear you enter. I beg your pardon for being so stupid—but—but—"

and pausing, she hid her face in her handkerchief. Bernard's heart was beating unmercifully. "There is no need for apology. Won't you rather tell me what is wrong? Who has been rude or unkind to you?" he said with commendable gravity.

"No one; indeed all here are so good to me that I am sometimes tempted to forget my subordinate position."

"Then there is some trouble which you will not share with another? Cannot you trust me? I shall respect your confidence."

"It is about poor papa," she faltered, "but you must not blame him; all his calamities have been the result of his generosity. We are poor people—but he, forgetful of this or any danger to himself, has foolishly—rather I should say nobly—stood bond for a friend in need—that friend has proved false and absconded—it means ruin for papa."

Bernard was infinitely touched by her grief,—

"Does his loss represent so large a sum?" he asked. "No, oh no; to you it will sound absurdly small—it is just thirty pounds, papa's whole quarterly allowance; of course it must be paid. But the question which frightens me is, how in the

meanwhile is he to live? Can you advise me what to do. I am so foolish and so ignorant of such matters. All my life papa has thought and acted for me."

"My first words of advice are, 'Dry your tears and cease to worry,'" said Bernard, smiling down at her. "My next that you make me your banker."

"Oh, Mr. Barstowe—I could not. You are very, very good, and I never can thank you enough; but papa is too proud to borrow money of a stranger when the chance of repaying him is so small and remote."

"Mr. Swannell need never know how you obtained the money; you shall be my debtor, if you will only accept help on that condition; and we will keep our secret inviolate—for your father's sake be a sensible girl."

Then, whilst she stood hesitating, he possessed himself of the hand which rested upon the table, saying in a tone of some emotion.

"You are a lonely girl—think of me as of a brother—let me help you in your dilemma, as I hope and pray some fellow would assist one of my sisters in a like case. Why should you hesitate? It is not as though you were robbing me of anything—rather you will be giving me exquisite pleasure."

"Then I accept your offer—for papa's sake—oh! how good you are! How I will economize to repay your loan; but, though I live years and years, I never can repay your kindness."

"Nonsense, Miss Swannell, it is a mere trifle. Now stay here whilst I go to get the notes, and let me see a brighter face when I return."

There was not much time to lose; he did not wish to be found with Cora for her sake, being well aware already that Lady Barstowe did not regard her very favourably, and not for worlds would he have harmed her. As he re-entered the room she turned to him with big appealing blue eyes,—

"You will not think the less of me that I obey you in this?"

"You foolish child! Is it not my wish? See, I have brought you notes as being more convenient for transit, now you can write and relieve your father's mind of its load of anxiety."

He moved as though to leave her, when she half-whispered,—

"Is there nothing I can do to show my gratitude?"

He could never tell why he answered as he did; the moment the words were uttered he regretted them, but they came swiftly,—

"You may let me kiss you!"

A bright blush dyed her cheeks, but without hesitation she lifted her face—her innocent baby-face—and in a shamed way, yet conscious all the while of a great rapture, he lightly touched her lips—then he fled.

She stood just where he had left her, the notes held tightly in her hand, and she laughed softly, blithely—

"Monsieur Bernard you are generous, you are gullible, you are also quite ready to make a fool of yourself over little Cora Swannell provided she plays her cards adroitly. Your notes, my friend, are salvation to me. What a convenient papa mine is; how he would rave if he knew I had thirty pounds in my possession, and he next to nothing."

She unfolded the paper Bernard had believed to be Mr. Swannell's letter; it was a bill from a certain Madame Kaley, with a brief message to the effect that unless Miss Swannell settled the claim against her, she should at once acquaint Lady Barstowe with her scandalous conduct.

"You shall have your twenty pounds, Madame," said Cora, viciously; "that will still leave me ten, and I shall change my dressmaker. How you will rage at yourself when I am Mrs. Bernard Barstowe, future châteline of Barstowe Hall."

CHAPTER III.

THAT foolish request, that first thoughtless kiss, combined with the generous gift, laid the foundation of a perfect understanding between Cora

and Bernard, paved the way to cruellest misery at least to one of them.

Then Mimi, in her innocence, gave a helping hand; she was always praising her pretty governess to her brother; extolling her goodness, her winning, winsome ways, so that the feeble, flickering of love was kindled into a fierce flame, and to his shame and despair Bernard Barstowe confessed to himself that Cora was all the world to him, and *he was to marry Helen*.

Daily his manner towards Helen grew more constrained; not all her gentleness, not all her goodness could touch him; he thought with horror of their fast approaching marriage; how could he bear to live a whole life out with her, when all his heart cried out for Cora? when he had the sure and certain knowledge that Cora loved him, and all unblushingly he had desolated her future!

Why, if she did not return his passion, had she refused Mr. Humphrey? He was not a bad "catch" for a penniless, friendless girl.

Daily Helen's eyes lost something of their light; daily her smile became less frequent, but there was no other outward sign of the inward conflict and grief.

She would not doubt the love which had grown with their growth, or dishonour him even by thinking him false.

It was Rhea who saw what others failed to see, or feared to acknowledge even to themselves; with all the strength of her reserved nature she loved Lady Helen, resented any slight she might endure more than a great injury done to herself, for the child had a loyal, generous nature.

One evening she alarmed her mother by entering her boudoir and requesting her to send away her maid.

As soon as the woman had disappeared she said,—

"Mother, how long is this sort of thing to go on?"

"My dear, what do you mean? What a very queer child you are."

Rhea passed this by without comment, saying almost fiercely,—

"I think you are all blind, or perhaps you won't see that Bernard is doing his best to grieve Helen and make himself ridiculous by his conduct with Miss Swannell."

"Rhea," in a tone of serious alarm, "what grounds have you for such an assertion?"

"Ample. He is always *en evidence* during our walks, and she waylays him on every possible occasion, in the corridors, on the stairs, it is all done so naturally (of course) that you or anyone else might easily be duped into believing it was accidental unless you knew Cora Swannell well—she is artfully artless, and I know that she means to marry Bernard—that he is willing."

"Rhea, you have no right to talk in such a way; it is most unbecoming in a girl of your years, who should have no thought beyond her books and play. Of course Bernard is courteous to Miss Swannell, and doubtless she is grateful to him for his consideration, but he is engaged to Helen, and your governess is scarcely likely to forget the difference in their relative positions."

Rhea laughed shortly; she was annoyed that her judgment should be doubted, and not old enough to know that her mother professed to scoff at it just to comfort herself.

"Very well," she said, "you will please yourself whether or no you believe me, but it is a significant fact that I left Bernard a little while ago in possession of Miss Swannell's corsage bouquet which he had begged from her, the artful little minx. How she professed to hesitate just to make him more eager," and with these words Rhea hastened from the room, leaving her mother a prey to many anxious thoughts and forebodings.

"She shall go," she exclaimed at last; "she shall not stay to work Helen misery! Rhea is not likely to speak rashly, and she is not a vindictive girl; as for Bernard—surely! surely he cannot mean earnestly by his attentions; if he does—" and rising she paced to and fro, to and fro in an agony of perplexity and pain, for her son was very dear to her.

She was so troubled, so ill at ease all that evening that when they were alone Sir John

questioned her as to the cause; she was half afraid to confide in him, and yet her trouble was far too serious for her to confront alone; ever since their happy marriage she had looked to him for guidance and support; so she began to unburden herself, when Sir John, who was a choleric man, brought his fist heavily down on a dainty table, shattering its costly ornaments.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "if the boy thinks to play fast and loose with Helen he must reckon first with me. The little jade shall go to-morrow. What I would my son give me an obscure, designing girl in lieu of my niece for a daughter!" and he so raved and stormed that Lady Barstowe, afraid of the tempest she had raised, said soothingly—

"We must not be unjust, John; and after all a child like Rhea may be easily mistaken."

"Rhea is older than her years, and not given to speaking without authority."

"But John, consider; although personally I distrust Miss Swannell I cannot forget that she is a motherless girl, quite alone in England; too young and too pretty to be thrown upon her own resources; if we send her away suddenly and without due inquiry she will lose all chance of getting further employment. Think, dear, what it would be if Rhea or Mimi were placed in such a terrible position."

"You are too easy," he growled, although her womanly words evidently had a softening effect; "but in your mercy to this girl you must not forget the claim Helen has upon us, the solemn promise we gave to guard her as our own. Has she nothing to say upon this subject?"

"Nothing; and surely if she had cause she would complain."

"She is the very last girl in the world to suspect evil of those she loves; to the pure all things are pure, and Helen has the rare gift of charity. Now what to do in the matter, that is the question, wife. Shall I speak to Bernard?"

"I think not, John; he may have been foolish, still have had no thought beyond a harmless flirtation. You know he is not to be driven, but led. Will you let to-morrow pass without broaching the subject to any creature, if I promise to keep watch upon him and Miss Swannell? At night I will tell you all that I have learned, and if of importance you shall act upon it."

He was very unwilling to concede so much; but by dint of persuasion and wifely endearments she wrested the promise from him, and each spent a miserable night thinking of Helen and of her grief, if indeed her lover proved false.

On the morning Cora to her disgust found that Lady Barstowe would accompany the girls in their mid-day walk, whilst she was politely requested to write the invitations for Sir John's birthday dinner, Sir John himself remaining in the library the whole time, so that there was no possible chance of escape, or conversation with Bernard, even should he put in an appearance.

The young man unhappy, full of self-scorn, yet could not resist the longing to see his golden-haired divinity, and lay wait for her in the way in which she would choose.

Advised by Rhea, my lady had sent the two children in advance, and as they turned the bend of the road she heard her son's voice, through which a thrill of excitement ran, cry—

"Well, youngsters, I seem in luck's way; I am always tumbling across you, and as I've nothing to do this morning I may as well share the customary walk;" then, glancing eagerly ahead, he saw only his mother and Rhea.

The former felt her heart sink when that disappointed look stole over his face, and her tone was icy as she said,—

"We shall be glad of your society, Bernard; I dare say the girls find it dull with me, as Miss Swannell remains at home to-day."

As he met her displeased regard he flushed uneasily, muttering some hurried unintelligible words, which were interrupted by the question,—

"What have you done with Helen? You left her house together, yet I meet you alone."

"Great Scott! do you think I've murdered her?" With forced hilarity, "mother, those tragedy airs don't suit you. The fact is, Helen

wanted to call at the school-house about the coming examination, and as she was likely to remain some time I asked permission to walk on, which she granted."

"You made a considerable *détour* to reach this spot if you came from the school," remarked my lady sceptically. "Well, as it really doesn't matter in the least which road we follow, I propose we return for Helen," and the wretched young fellow dared make no remonstrance, but the walk was uncomfortable in the extreme, and when Helen joined him he found it even worse.

Once or twice the girl, glancing at his moody abstracted face, stifled a sigh; her heart often ached now, but she would give no sign; she was a gentlewoman not only by birth but in feeling, and she had the courage which leads martyrs smiling to their grisome deaths, and impels men to risk liberty, life or limb for the love and honour of country.

To Cora's dismay she found her presence was not required either in dining or drawing-room that evening.

"Can it be they guess? Do they know anything?" she questioned of herself as she sat alone in her apartment, and breaking in upon her reverie came Rhea's voice from the school-room,—

"Mimi, you are not to go to Miss Swannell; mother does not approve your excessive friendship, and I think in a few days she will leave us. She is neither nice nor good, and wants to take Bernard away from Helen."

"I don't care if she does; Cora is a deal nicer than Helen, and you are an ugly beast for telling mother tales; I'll warn Cora."

Then the door was closed with a bang, and in the centre of the room stood the little governess, her face ablaze with demoniacal fury, her hands clenched, her eyes flaming as she muttered,—

"So I am to go, to be sent away in disgrace, and Mademoiselle Rhea is the cause! My child, you will find me a hard creditor when the day of reckoning comes; and these dull, heavy one-sided people will thwart me! Will they? Then they do not yet know of what stuff my father's daughter is made! I will risk all on one throw—it is worth the chance."

Catching up a light wrap she stole downstairs, waiting with patience for the appearance of Bernard; he never stayed long over his wine, it being his custom each evening to walk on the terrace which ran the length of the library before joining the ladies; his mother was specially engaged with the vicar's wife, his father talking politics with the vicar, so that Cora had little to fear from them.

Presently he came out; she halted in her nook until he drew near, then darting forward she laid a small light hand upon his arm, saying scarcely above her breath,—

"Mr. Bernard! oh, Mr. Bernard! I must speak to you—and at once."

He was startled; the blood was coursing madly through his veins—she was so fair, so dear, he longed to catch her close and kiss her fast. But constraining himself to speak calmly, he asked,—

"What is it? You know I am always at your service."

"Oh, I beg for nothing," she waived, "but I felt I could not go without saying good-bye."

"Good-bye!" he echoed, "what do you mean—Cora, why are you sobbing so?"

"Because I am leaving you all—this dear, happy home—to go out into a world which has never been kind to me! Because, after to-morrow I am a penniless girl with only the river as a refuge before her."

"Great Heaven! Cora, you are either mad or I am dreaming."

"No, no; it is all true! I heard them talking together; they said I must go; and poor as I am I will not wait until I am driven away in disgrace."

"Why should you be driven away? It must be a horrible mistake, or is it that I love you too well? Cora, you know it—and you have learned to love me."

CHAPTER IV.

He stretched out his arms to her, and still sobbing she allowed him to clasp her to his breast.

"Oh," she moaned, "it is hard, it is hard! but I must not murmur against my lot—I sinned in loving you and for that sin must suffer."

"You shall not go," he cried, carried out of himself by the tumult of his feelings. "I cannot believe my people would do you such foul injustices. If either must suffer I will be the one; the fault is all mine. Oh, my darling! my darling, how can I bear to let you slip out of my life!"

She wanted something more definite, and with a view to gaining her end went on plaintively,—

"In a little while you will forget me—Lady Helen is so good I need must appear dark beside her—and oh! with all my heart I hope that you will be very happy—as for me," she paused; her face was still half hidden on his breast, but she caught a glimpse of a tall figure entering one of the library windows—it was Helen, and she had gauged that gentle, noble nature well. With a little deft movement she slipped from Bernard's arms, flying along the terrace until she reached the window by which her victim had entered. There she paused feigning breathlessness, and Bernard joining her, caught her by the wrists, asking hoarsely,—

"What are you going to do, Cora? You shall not leave me thus. What are your plans?"

"I have none; oh, let me go away whilst I have strength and courage. I was always such a coward—and I fear death, yet not so much as the dreary life into which you will never enter any more."

"Cora! oh, my heart's darling, do you think I will let you leave me thus? You are more to me than all beside—let me beg Helen for my freedom—she does not love me as you love."

Inside a woman stood with rigid face and agonized eyes, with arms dropped slackly by her side, and in her heart the cry,—

"Heaven help me—I am forsaken."

"Oh," said Cora's voice. "I do not know how that may be; I only feel I could never do her so bitter a wrong, or win happiness by another woman's misery. And however long I might live, however great that poor beauty you have been pleased to praise, I never could be worthy you. I am all unfit to be your wife."

"I will never call another woman by that name," he cried. "Cora, I have never loved Helen—"

"Oh, hush, hush! You break my heart! This is more bitter than death," groaned the listener; but the pitiless voice did not cease.

"She has seen and accepted the fact from the first; our marriage was arranged by our people, we were merely puppets in their hands—now I refuse to be coerced. I choose for myself; I do not suppose for an instant my father will consent to our union, but even should he prove obdurate, I am young, have many influential friends, and can work for you when I have found the work to do."

That prospect had no charm for Cora, who interrupted him in a tone of meek resignation,—

"No, no dear Bernard, not for me shall you lose all that makes life good for you. I would rather die than hurt you—and so good-bye," but just as she tendered a little hand a voice said,—

"You need not say good-bye; I have heard all—Bernard you are free. It is true I—I do not love you, as does this poor child. I hope you will be very happy," and then Helen had glided by them, allowing Bernard no chance for speech; but her words, "I do not love you," carried comfort to him; he did not see her face as she uttered them, and only Cora knew how much she suffered, what wrong she did her own loyal heart.

"Free! I cannot believe it yet—free a without dishonour. How generous Helen is! Cora, you will not send me away now!"

"Not of my own will; but oh! what will Sir John say? Who will tell him?"

The question a trifle sobered Bernard.

"I suppose I must," he answered; but when

he went to his own room that night he found a line in Helen's hand,—

"Leave everything to me; I think I may assure you there is nothing to fear."

"She is a brick," he thought gratefully; "but what a good thing for us both that we discovered our mistake in time," and on her knees before her open window knelt a woman dry-eyed, with upturned tortured face, moaning to her wrong heart,—

"Forsaken! forsaken! Would Heaven that I were dead."

The next day there was a dreadful scene with Sir John, but Helen bore the first outburst of his rage with a composure and dignity which almost seemed to confirm her words.

"I think it all for the best; Bernard and I are not meant for man and wife—you think I love him—well, I do, but not enough to spoil his life and mine."

Then she pleaded for Cora in tender womanly fashion, spoke of her resolve to go away, of her struggle with and victory over herself, of her pathetic words to Bernard, until, in spite of himself, Sir John was touched, and when she finished thus,—

"I do not care what the gossips may say. Nothing shall induce me to marry my cousin," he answered vexedly,—

"If that is the case it matters little what woman he weds so that she is pure and a lady. Send the culprit to me."

She found Bernard in the library.

"Go to your father," she said, quietly, "and I will presently bring Cora to you; I bid you hope; but she could not stay to hear his thanks, that was beyond even her strength."

Trembling with excitement, which others construed into fear, Cora entered Sir Julian's presence, her lover advancing to meet her, and taking her by the hand, he said,—

"Father, this is my wife."

"With or without my permission? You take a high hand, young man. Miss Swannell, what have you to say that can justify you in stealing away my niece's lover; in teaching him forgetfulness of honour and truth?"

"Nothing," she sobbed, hiding her face on Bernard's shoulder. "Oh, do not think I meant to wrong him and Lady Helen, or that I meditated the betrayal of your trust. I do not hope for pardon, I only pray you to let me go in peace—and let all the blame be upon me—not upon your son."

"That is utter rot!" cried Sir John. "I don't suppose you did the wooing; Bernard is even more to blame than you." (His manner was fast softening—the sight of her beauty, coupled with her distress, touched the fatherly heart.) "What do you purpose doing when you leave here? Are you going to Mr. Swannell?"

She shook her head.

"I cannot be a burthen upon him;" then, suddenly looking up, her pretty eyes full of tears, she added, "Do not question me about my future, I can tell you nothing; only, when I am gone, try to think a little kindly of one who never thought to injure you or yours. For all your goodness to me I thank and bless you. I have been very happy."

She paused, her voice all shaken with emotion, and the Baronet said,—

"Bernard, are you sure of yourself? Are you confident you love this girl?"

"Yes; with all my heart I do."

His words stabbed Helen to the heart.

"And you, Helen. Is it for your best happiness your contract should be broken?"

"It is."

"Then, Bernard, you must please yourself; but if, in the time to come, either you or your wife regret this hour's work, do not reproach me for my weakness."

Then, as he was never a man who did things by halves, he bade Cora go to him and, as he kissed her, said,—

"My dear, be to him a good wife, and you shall never complain in future that I was less than father to you. Here, take your sweetheart, comfort her; she is trembling like a beaten child."

And no one noticed that Helen had escaped.

Up to her room she dragged her weary steps. Her work was over, her sacrifice complete; she longed to steal to some remote spot, there to die of her bleeding wounds. Only life was so strong within her—so pitilessly strong. Yet in all, through all, she thanked Heaven she had been able to place Bernard and his happiness first. Believing, as she did, that Cora was loyal, loving, pure, she thought,—

"He has chosen wisely. She has all that men most prize; whilst I—I never could be aught but ugly in his eyes. Oh! what a blind fool I was to dream he could love me, and how bitterly I am punished for my folly."

When Lady Barstowe heard the news she rose up in her wrath.

"I never will call that girl my daughter, never receive her into my heart; she has usurped Helen's place. She would not have cared to do so had Bernard's prospects been less good." And she turned a deaf ear to Sir John's remonstrances. To Cora her manner was frigid in the extreme. "I cannot wish you happiness," she said, "nor do I believe you will enjoy it, because you do not deserve it. But, as Sir John has accepted you, so I outwardly will do the same; there shall be no scandal; but let me see you as little as you can."

And Cora had heard with drooped head; but when the door had closed upon her visitor she started up, her hands fiercely clenched, her face white with rage.

"Your day now, but mine will come; and then, my lady, I will have a heavy reckoning with you!"

Naturally the change of brides caused a great deal of gossip; but everybody was agreed that Cora would make a most delightful Mrs. Barstowe, and of course the Lady Helen could in no way compare favourably with her. So preparations for the wedding (which was to be solemnised in July) went on apace, and now that Sir John had yielded to Cora's fascinations he rapidly became attached to her.

She was clever, she had such an innocent babyish face, was so affectionate and deferential that he thought, "After all Bernard has not made a bad choice. Of course I would rather have called Helen daughter, but Cora is a dear little soul, when one knows her well, and she will make him happy."

Mr. Swannell came over from Baden for the ceremony, arriving the day before; and, as he and his daughter had so long been separated it was natural they should desire a long and private interview.

One of the reception-rooms was therefore devoted to their service, and the most curious of eavesdroppers could have gleaned nothing of their conversation by pausing at the door, for they conversed almost in whispers.

Mr. Swannell, a handsome, distinguished-looking man (he had once been a gentleman, but was now a card-sharper) congratulated his daughter on her skill "in hooking such a big fish," adding that once safely Bernard's wife she could give her "always affectionate father material assistance."

Cora smiled strangely.

"Had I been a plain child you would long ago have left me upon the world's charity; but seeing I had beauty you thought to repair your fallen fortunes through me. I have done well for myself; but I do not consider it my duty (certainly it is not my inclination) to beggar myself on your behalf or to risk exposure through you. See, here papa, you cannot live in England, you are too well known, lots of people meeting would recognise you as the man who was kicked out of his various clubs some years ago for cheating at cards, and who narrowly escaped punishment for forgery. That is why I proposed to be married in this deadly hole. I won't be thwarted at the last moment, and when I leave en route for Spain you will start for Baden. You are on no account to visit me on my return unless I expressly send for you. For the rest, I shall allow you a pound a week."

"A beggarly pound! Cora, I wonder you have the audacity to offer me such a pittance when, if I chose to speak, I could upset all your matrimonial arrangements."

"But you will not," confidently, "because to a

man who, like yourself, has lived so many years by his wits alone, a small nest egg is a veritable godsend."

It was useless to argue with her, this pretty, unprincipled daughter, who was as equally selfish and much more avaricious than he. So, reluctantly, he agreed to her terms, on the morrow giving her with an air of fatherly resignation into Bernard's keeping, smiling grimly to think of the bridegroom's bitter awakening.

CHAPTER IV.

A YEAR went fleetly by, and as yet Bernard had not repented his marriage. There were one or two things he would have liked altered in his wife. She was just a trifle too fond of admiration, just a thought too coquettish; but then she was very young and very pretty; and because he loved her with blind unreasoning passion he never found it hard to forgive her trivial errors, especially as she reserved her sweetest smiles for him.

Then their child was born. To Bernard it was a disappointment on account of its sex, yet he loved the baby-girl because Cora was her mother, and it troubled him that she should show so little pride in, or affection for, the mite.

With Sir John Mrs. Bernard was now chief favourite; but between Lady Barstowe and her daughter-in-law there was armed neutrality, whilst Rhea displayed silent hostility.

Thus matters stood when a telegram reached the young couple informing them of Sir John's sudden and dangerous illness, and begging them to go to Barstowe with all despatch.

Cora's eyes glistened as she read the news; but she was a clever actress, and did nothing which might betray her true feelings to Bernard, who deeply loved his father.

They travelled by express to Barstowe; but arrived too late to receive the Baronet's blessing. Then followed the sad, heavy days, during which Lady Barstowe sat like one stunned, or lean her head upon Helen's shoulder moaning as a hurt animal; and Cora, taking the reins in her small hands, managed the household with authority and skill.

After the funeral the will was read in the presence of the assembled friends. It was very simple and explicit. It had not been in Sir John's power to bequeath his widow more than the settlements made upon her at her marriage (she, herself had been "a penniless lass with a long pedigree") and each of the three girls would come into a fortune of two thousand pounds on attaining their majority.

To Bernard went the residue of the property, and the whole estate; "but," his father added, "I trust he will in all things consider his mother's happiness, and his sisters' future welfare. The Dower House is my wife's, so long as she needs it; but I have such faith in my son's affection that I do not believe he will allow his mother to end her days except beneath the roof which has so long sheltered her."

Cora's face was hidden behind her black fan as she heard these words, and it was instinct with purpose.

The next day when Bernard and she were together alone she told him that she had telegraphed for her maid, the nurse, and baby to join them at once, adding,—

"This is now your home, I believe, Bernard?"

"Yes, but we need not dwell too much upon that fact, wife; I should not like my mother to feel too keenly the difference which my father's death has made to her in such matters; and I am sure you and she can live together in amity."

"I must be sole mistress of my own home," returned Cora resolutely, "and I think it best for young people to have a separate establishment. Of course the Dowager Lady Barstowe will be a welcome visitor—but she has the Dower House, and to that she must remove with the girls—excepting Mimi, of course; she was never allied to me."

She stared at her as though he thought her impudent, then he said,—

John Barstowe's niece, Helen Carstairs. There is the gong, we must make haste to get our seats before Sir John appears."

"I lost my way," said a pretty plaintive voice, "I suppose I took a wrong turning."

"The corridors are confusing," then as they walked side by side, Helen looked with frank admiration at her companion, who was such an utter contrast to herself. "What a child you are!" she exclaimed in her pleasant, unaffected voice, "and how very pretty; almost I am tempted to envy you."

A slight blush rose to the girl's face; it was not often women accorded her such homage, yet she was undoubtedly attractive. *Petite* in face and figure, "divinely fair," with large limpid blue eyes, looking innocently from beneath dark brows and lashes; a small mouth, curved like Cupid's bow, and a mass of curly yellow hair—that was Cora Swannell. She had little appealing ways, which reminded one of a pretty timid child, and her voice was sweet as a bird's when she lifted it in song.

She was very demure and shy that first evening, scarcely lifting her eyes from her plate, answering any remark addressed to her in a low tone, and a little timid upward glance. She impressed Sir John favourably, so that when she retired, he said,—

"A nice little girl, my dear, a thought too young, perhaps, but our children are not difficult to govern—she is quite a beauty too."

"Too much so," remarked her ladyship, stealing an anxious glance at Bernard, who had been quite silent on the subject of Cora's looks; his mother thought that silence ominous, but Helen was so frank in her praise, so evidently undisturbed by Cora's superior charms that she tried to believe all would be well.

In the morning Miss Swannell settled down to her duties in a way which proved she had had some experience in tuition.

There were three girls in the schoolroom; Rhea, fourteen; Mimi, twelve; and Dulcie, seven. The two younger girls were as childish as their years; but Rhea was grave and composed as a woman; she was clever too, and Cora did not feel quite free from embarrassment under the regard of the thoughtful dark eyes which were so like Helen's in form and colour.

With Mimi she was quickly on friendliest terms, so that when the morning walk was taken, her second pupil walked with her, whilst Rhea, with Dulcie, preceded them.

"What a happy home yours appears to be!" said Cora, as the child clung to her arm, "and what a change from the grinding routine of school!"

"Yes, we are jolly people, rather," admitted Mimi, who dearly loved the sound of her own prattle, "and we mean to make you so comfortable that you won't wish to leave us until you are married. Miss Lester, our last governess stayed with us until her wedding-eve. She married a missionary and went out to Africa. I wouldn't want to be her. I don't like negroes, and I don't like missionaries."

"I am afraid you are a very unorthodox young lady."

"That is what Bernard says. He vows I ought to have been a boy. I wish I were one, what fun I'd have. Did you teach in a school, Miss Swannell?"

"Yes, ever since I was fifteen; it was dreary work," with a little sigh; "but there was no help for it. Up to that time I had been a parlor boarder. Then papa lost almost all his money, and things changed for me."

"Oh, how sorry I am! yet, if you were rich, we shouldn't have you for a governess, and that would be a pity; you are so nice and pretty. Is your poor papa alive? and where is your home, Miss Swannell? Oh, please don't think me rude or tell Rhea how many questions I ask. I am not inquisitive, but I do like to know all about people I care for."

Cora smiled.

"So you care for me already? Well that is a good beginning, and I am not at all vexed with you for being interested in my affairs. My papa is living abroad because that is cheaper. He is a proud man, and could not endure to meet those

who had known him in his prosperous days. He has no settled home, so that we do not often meet, which is a great grief to us because we love each other dearly."

"I shall ask papa to invite him here," said Mimi, promptly, "you would like that, wouldn't you, dear?"

"You have a kind heart, little Mimi; and although it is unlikely Sir John should ever extend his hospitality to my father I thank you just the same. I feel sure we are going to be the best of friends. I want you to love me as dearly as you seem to love Miss Carstairs."

"Helen! oh yes, she is very kind; but she is Lady not Miss Helen. She has always lived with us since uncle died, and is going to marry Bernard."

Cora gave a little start; then she said,—

"I suppose they love each other very fondly."

"I don't know," indifferently. "Of course Bernard likes Helen, and she is very fond of him; but they didn't choose each other. Uncle and father arranged all that ever so long ago."

She had spoken more loudly than she thought, and her words reached Rhea, who, turning sharply, said,—

"Mimi, you should not discuss family affairs with a stranger. Mamma would not like it; and she shot a decidedly rebukeful look at the governess, who flushed scarlet.

"I am afraid I have been imprudent to let you chatter so much," she said; but the irrepressible one broke out, "Why should I not tell you what everybody knows, and I haven't said any harm, only Rhea is so starchy. I am glad you will be here to the wedding. We shall have such fun. It is to be on the first of September, so we have only five months to wait. I wish Helen was prettier. All brides ought to be lovely."

She did not continue her confidences, because Rhea, dropping into the rear, said,—

"Take Dulcie, and I will walk with Miss Swannell. I am sure you are bothering her with your chatter;" and there was nothing for Mimi but to obey her resolute sister.

The remainder of the walk was quiet enough, conversation first languishing then utterly dying out, so that Cora was glad when they reached home.

Gaining her room she threw aside her hat with an angry gesture.

"The little prig!" she muttered through her pretty white teeth. "I'll be even with her yet. I never forgive or forget an insult." She stood with her pretty brows puckered into a frown, the line of her mouth sharply curved. Then thrusting the yellow curls back from her babyish brow she laughed softly. "How stupid to be so easily vexed," she said, and sauntered away to the schoolroom, which was quite deserted. Above the mantel hung a portrait of Helen—Rhea's property—before this stood Cora, minutely examining and cruelly criticising every feature. Presently she spoke. "So you will marry Bernard Barstowe—perhaps. Fate, in the form of Cora Swannell, may have something to say to that. You are too presumptuous, my dear, and too covetous. You have birth, position, riches; I have only beauty, and that I pit against your advantages. I do not think *Le Beau Cousin* is for you; but we shall see!"

She was very sweet and kindly throughout the day to Mimi. The child might be of use to her, was already her friend and champion, and in her simplicity would divulge the whole family history and fortune if judiciously played upon. To Rhea she displayed a gentle consideration, a "I forgive-you freely style," which that young lady hotly resented; but which she could not comment upon. But she said to Helen,—

"I dislike Miss Swannell more than I can tell; worse than ever when she purrs. She isn't real in any way."

"What do you mean, dear? Don't you think you are just a wee bit too confident in your own judgment, and very uncharitable?"

"I am neither," answered Rhea, promptly, "as you will learn some day. We are not all like you, Helen. We should be better if we were, and I still insist that Cora Swannell is false in nature, superficial in education."

CHAPTER II.

THE first Sunday at church proved a signal success for Cora. As her pretty face appeared in Sir John's pew more than one young fellow felt his heart beat a thought faster with admiration.

There was a scarcity of beauty at Barstowe and the surrounding villages, so that the new governess proved doubly attractive.

Then, as the pure sweet voice rose in joyous music, both Rector and Curate turned towards her with a look of interest. What an acquisition she would be to the extremely poor choir! Would it be possible to win her to such work!

Straightway the Rector resolved to approach Sir John on the subject; perhaps he would use his influence with this beautiful girl!

The ladies shook their heads doubtfully as they gossiped on their homeward way.

"The governess was far too pretty; she made dear Lady Helen look positively plain; and, after all, Bernard was but a man, and might be tempted from his allegiance."

The next Sunday Miss Swannell took her place in the choir; and as she sang, with her great blue eyes uplifted in cherubic fashion, her admirers declared she most resembled an angel. But Rhea said, scoffingly,—

"Yes, the angels one sees on Christmas cards, with eyes twice the size of their mouths! Pooh! she is a sham, and I hate shams of any kind."

No one asked Bernard's opinion of the girl; perhaps at this time he could not have given it. He knew she was beautiful, that her beauty stirred him strangely; but that was natural, seeing he had an artistic temperament. Yet why, as the days went by, did he tell himself so often that "Helen was a dear good girl; that he was a fortunate fellow to have won her!"

Deep down in his heart there was already a vague doubt that he did not hold her quite so dear as he ought, considering the relationship between them; but, man like, he tried to stifle it. He played round and about it, driving off the moment when he must face and fight it. He seldom saw Cora alone, but that only aggravated affairs.

Anxiously he waited each lunch or dinner hour; how anxiously he hardly knew. He began to take particular notice of and interest in her dainty toilets; to watch every change of her expressive face; to burn with jealous rage when he met Mr. Humphry (the Curate) walking with her, or saw him gazing intently at her in church. Once he said to her,—

"You are like all girls in one particular."

"And that, Mr. Bernard!" with a shy, upward glance at him.

"You are deeply devoted to the clergy."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it is true; you do not deny it; and you let Humphry monopolise you."

"Don't you mean *victimise*?" she questioned, with a pretty laugh. "Really he bores me dreadfully at times with his parish gossip that I can hardly refrain from snubbing him. I suppose," reflectively, "if I were good, like dear Lady Helen, I should be intensely interested; but I am an everyday, pleasure-loving, selfish little mortal!"

"I am sure you are not selfish," he began, when, looking up, he confronted Rhea's extremely critical and disdainful eyes.

"Bernard, have you forgotten that the horses are at the door, and Helen is waiting?" she said, with a significant glance at Cora, who instantly slipped away.

"I wish you would trouble your head about your own affairs," the young man snapped. "I have been cooling my heels these twenty minutes whilst Helen dressed. 'Pon my word, Rhea, Mimi has fifty times your courtesy.'"

"Mimi is very fond of Miss Swannell," retorted the young lady, as she fled, leaving her brother to digest her words.

He felt angry and uneasy. It was difficult to converse with the girl who rode by his side. It was the one accomplishment in which Helen excelled, and she looked splendid in the saddle; but he was wondering all the while how Cora would appear in like circumstances; conjuring

up the vision of a fair face flushed into added beauty with the unwonted exercise; the pretty lips a little parted, showing a glimpse of small white teeth, the great limpid eyes all aglow with happiness and excitement, the soft curling hair just loosened about the dainty cheeks and slender throat.

Then how pleasant to hear the babble of that liquid voice, whose sweetness was in no way marred by the faint suspicion of a lip! He started guiltily when Helen suddenly addressed him.

"Are not you well, dear? You have been so quiet of late, and you look as though you had the affairs of the nation upon your shoulders. What is the trouble?"

He laughed in a half-hearted fashion.

"There is no trouble; but the truth is, Nell, I am sick of my aimless life. When we are married" (he spoke the words bravely) "you shall teach me how to make it nobler, fuller; at present I am like to die of ennui."

Her true eyes brightened.

"You feel that life was not meant to be all play. Oh, Bernard, it is good to arrive at such knowledge—with you to help me, to guide me, what a vast deal may be accomplished."

He was touched by her words; leaning towards her he possessed himself of one shapely hand.

"Helen, I wish I were a better fellow for your sake."

"Suppose" (with an arch look) "I prefer you as you are with all your faults and imperfections on your head! Oh, Bernard, I would not have you changed in any one thing from the Bernard I have always known—and loved," the last words were whispered, and as she spoke them the rich colour mounted to her usually pale cheeks, her eyes were full of a shy gladness.

"You hold me in too high esteem, sweetheart," he said; "but, please Heaven, you shall never regret giving yourself to me," and in his heart he was praying, "May my hand be the last to wound her, may Heaven in its mercy keep me loyal in thought and deed!"

It was a pity when he was so full of gentleness towards her, so earnest in his desire to abide by that old contract, that he should chance upon Cora. He was coming downstairs, when his steps were arrested by the sound of low sobbing. Thinking that Mimi or Dulcie had fallen into disgrace, he pushed open the door, to see a pretty head bowed upon folded arms, a slender little figure shaken with emotion. His thoughts flew to Rhea, and advancing quickly, he said,—

"Miss Swannell, Miss Swannell, what is it?"

She uttered a low cry as she started to her feet; he saw that she grasped a paper in one hand, whilst with the other she shaded her eyes.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" she murmured. "I—I did not hear you enter. I beg your pardon for being so stupid—but—but—"

and pausing, she hid her face in her handkerchief.

Bernard's heart was beating unmercifully.

"There is no need for apology. Won't you rather tell me what is wrong? Who has been rude or unkind to you?" he said with commendable gravity.

"No one; indeed all here are so good to me that I am sometimes tempted to forget my subordinate position."

"Then there is some trouble which you will not share with another? Cannot you trust me? I shall respect your confidence."

"It is about poor papa," she faltered, "but you must not blame him; all his calamities have been the result of his generosity. We are poor people—but he, forgetful of this or any danger to himself, has foolishly—rather I should say nobly—stood bond for a friend in need—that friend has proved false and absconded—it means ruin for papa."

Bernard was infinitely touched by her grief,—

"Does his loss represent so large a sum?" he asked.

"No, oh no; to you it will sound absurdly small—it is just thirty pounds, papa's whole quarterly allowance; of course it must be paid. But the question which frightens me is, how in the

meanwhile is he to live? Can you advise me what to do. I am so foolish and so ignorant of such matters. All my life papa has thought and acted for me."

"My first words of advice are, 'Dry your tears and cease to worry,'" said Bernard, smiling down at her. "My next that you make me your banker."

"Oh, Mr. Barstowe—I could not. You are very, very good, and I never can thank you enough; but papa is too proud to borrow money of a stranger when the chance of repaying him is so small and remote."

"Mr. Swannell need never know how you obtained the money; you shall be my debtor, if you will only accept help on that condition; and we will keep our secret inviolate—for your father's sake be a sensible girl."

Then, whilst she stood hesitating, he possessed himself of the hand which rested upon the table, saying in a tone of some emotion,

"You are a lonely girl—think of me as of a brother—let me help you in your dilemma, as I hope and pray some fellow would assist one of my sisters in a like case. Why should you hesitate? It is not as though you were robbing me of anything—rather you will be giving me exquisite pleasure."

"Then I accept your offer—for papa's sake—oh! how good you are! How I will economize to repay your loan; but, though I live years and years, I never can repay your kindness."

"Nonsense, Miss Swannell, it is a mere trifle. Now stay here whilst I go to get the notes, and let me see a brighter face when I return."

There was not much time to lose; he did not wish to be found with Cora for her sake, being well aware already that Lady Barstowe did not regard her very favourably, and not for worlds would he have harmed her. As he re-entered the room she turned to him with big appealing blue eyes,—

"You will not think the less of me that I obey you in this?"

"You foolish child! is it not my wish? See, I have brought you notes as being more convenient for transit, now you can write and relieve your father's mind of its load of anxiety." He moved as though to leave her, when she half-whispered,—

"Is there nothing I can do to show my gratitude?"

He could never tell why he answered as he did; the moment the words were uttered he regretted them, but they came swiftly,—

"You may let me kiss you!"

A bright blush dyed her cheeks, but without hesitation she lifted her face—her innocent baby-face—and in a shamed way, yet conscious all the while of a great rapture, he lightly touched her lips—then he fled.

She stood just where he had left her, the notes held tightly in her hand, and she laughed softly, blithely—

"Monsieur Bernard you are generous, you are gullible, you are also quite ready to make a fool of yourself over little Cora Swannell provided she plays her cards adroitly. Your notes, my friend, are salvation to me. What a convenient papa mine is; how he would rave if he knew I had thirty pounds in my possession, and he next to nothing."

She unfolded the paper Bernard had believed to be Mr. Swannell's letter; it was a bill from a certain Madame Kaley, with a brief message to the effect that unless Miss Swannell settled the claim against her, she should at once acquaint Lady Barstowe with her scandalous conduct.

"You shall have your twenty pounds, Madame," said Cora, viciously; "that will still leave me ten, and I shall change my dressmaker. How you will rage at yourself when I am Mrs. Bernard Barstowe, future châteline of Barstowe Hall."

CHAPTER III.

THAT foolish request, that first thoughtless kiss, combined with the generous gift, laid the foundation of a perfect understanding between Cora

and Bernard, paved the way to cruellest misery at least to one of them.

Then Mimi, in her innocence, gave a helping hand; she was always praising her pretty governess to her brother; extolling her goodness, her winning, winsome ways, so that the feeble, flickering of love was kindled into a fierce flame, and to his shame and despair Bernard Barstowe confessed to himself that Cora was all the world to him, and he was to marry Helen.

Daily his manner towards Helen grew more constrained; not all her gentleness, not all her goodness could touch him; he thought with horror of their fast approaching marriage; how could he bear to live a whole life out with her, when all his heart cried out for Cora? when he had the sure and certain knowledge that Cora loved him, and all unblushingly he had desolated her future!

Why, if she did not return his passion, had she refused Mr. Humphrey? He was not a bad "catch" for a penniless, frindless girl.

Daily Helen's eyes lost something of their light; daily her smile became less frequent, but there was no other outward sign of the inward conflict and grief.

She would not doubt the love which had grown with their growth, or dishonour him even by thinking him false.

It was Rhea who saw what others failed to see, or feared to acknowledge even to themselves; with all the strength of her reserved nature she loved Lady Helen, resented any slight she might endure more than a great injury done to herself, for the child had a loyal, generous nature.

One evening she alarmed her mother by entering her boudoir and requesting her to send away her maid.

As soon as the woman had disappeared she said,—

"Mother, how long is this sort of thing to go on?"

"My dear, what do you mean? What a very queer child you are."

Rhea passed this by without comment, saying almost fiercely,—

"I think you are all blind, or perhaps you won't see that Bernard is doing his best to grieve Helen and make himself ridiculous by his conduct with Miss Swannell."

"Rhea," in a tone of serious alarm, "what grounds have you for such an assertion?"

"Ample. He is always *en evidence* during our walks, and she waylays him on every possible occasion, in the corridors, on the stairs, it is all done so naturally (of course) that you or anyone else might easily be duped into believing it was accidental unless you knew Cora Swannell well—she is artfully artless, and I know that she means to marry Bernard—that he is willing."

"Rhea, you have no right to talk in such a way; it is most unbecoming in a girl of your years, who should have no thought beyond her books and play. Of course Bernard is courteous to Miss Swannell, and doubtless she is grateful to him for his consideration, but he is engaged to Helen, and your governess is scarcely likely to forget the difference in their relative positions."

Rhea laughed shortly; she was annoyed that her judgment should be doubted, and not old enough to know that her mother professed to scoff at it just to comfort herself.

"Very well," she said, "you will please yourself whether or no you believe me, but it is a significant fact that I left Bernard a little while ago in possession of Miss Swannell's corsage bouquet which he had begged from her, the artful little minx. How she professed to hesitate just to make him more eager," and with these words Rhea hastened from the room, leaving her mother a prey to many anxious thoughts and forebodings.

"She shall go," she exclaimed at last; "she shall not stay to work Helen misery! Rhea is not likely to speak rashly, and she is not a vindictive girl; as for Bernard—surely I surely he cannot mean earnestly by his attentions; if he does—" and rising she paced to and fro, to and fro in an agony of perplexity and pain, for her son was very dear to her.

She was so troubled, so ill at ease all that evening that when they were alone Sir John

questioned her as to the cause; she was half afraid to confide in him, and yet her trouble was far too serious for her to confront alone; ever since their happy marriage she had looked to him for guidance and support; so she began to unbend herself, when Sir John, who was a choleric man, brought his fist heavily down on a dainty table, shattering its costly ornaments.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "if the boy thinks to play fast and loose with Helen he must reckon first with me. The little jade shall go to-morrow. What! would my son give me an obscure, designing girl in lieu of my niece for a daughter!" and he so raved and stormed that Lady Barstowe, afraid of the tempest she had raised, said soothingly,—

"We must not be unjust, John; and after all a child like Rhea may be easily mistaken."

"Rhea is older than her years, and not given to speaking without authority."

"But John, consider; although personally I distrust Miss Swannell I cannot forget that she is a motherless girl, quite alone in England; too young and too pretty to be thrown upon her own resources; if we send her away suddenly and without due inquiry she will lose all chance of getting further employment. Think, dear, what it would be if Rhea or Mimi were placed in such a terrible position."

"You are too easy," he growled, although her womanly words evidently had a softening effect; "but in your mercy to this girl you must not forget the claim Helen has upon us, the solemn promise we gave to guard her as our own. Has she nothing to say upon this subject?"

"Nothing; and surely if she had cause she would complain."

"She is the very last girl in the world to suspect evil of those she loves; 'to the pure all things are pure,' and Helen has the rare gift of charity. Now what to do in the matter, that is the question, wife. Shall I speak to Bernard?"

"I think not, John; he may have been foolish, still have had no thought beyond a harmless flirtation. You know he is not to be driven, but led. Will you let to-morrow pass without broaching the subject to any creature, if I promise to keep watch upon him and Miss Swannell? At night I will tell you all that I have learned, and if of importance you shall act upon it."

He was very unwilling to concede so much; but by dint of persuasion and wifely endearments she wrested the promise from him, and each spent a miserable night thinking of Helen and of her grief, if indeed her lover proved false.

On the morrow Cora to her disgust found that Lady Barstowe would accompany the girls in their mid-day walk, whilst she was politely requested to write the invitations for Sir John's birthday dinner, Sir John himself remaining in the library the whole time, so that there was no possible chance of escape, or conversation with Bernard, even should he put in an appearance.

The young man unhappy, full of self-scorn, yet could not resist the longing to see his golden-haired divinity, and lay wait for her in the way he knew she would choose.

Advised by Rhea, my lady had sent the two children in advance, and as they turned the bend of the road she heard her son's voice, through which a thrill of excitement ran, cry,—

"Well, youngsters, I seem in luck's way; I am always tumbling across you, and as I've nothing to do this morning I may as well share the customary walk;" then, glancing eagerly ahead, he saw only his mother and Rhea.

The former felt her heart sink when that disappointed look stole over his face, and her tone was icy as she said,—

"We shall be glad of your society, Bernard; I dare say the girls find it dull with me, as Miss Swannell remains at home to-day."

As he met her displeased regard he flushed uneasily, muttering some hurried unintelligible words, which were interrupted by the question,—

"What have you done with Helen? You left her house together, yet I meet you alone."

"Great Scott! do you think I've murdered her!" With forced hilarity, "mother, these tragedy airs don't suit you. The fact is, Helen

wanted to call at the school-house about the coming examination, and as she was likely to remain some time I asked permission to walk on, which she granted."

"You made a considerable *détour* to reach this spot if you came from the school," remarked my lady sceptically. "Well, as it really doesn't matter in the least which road we follow, I propose we return for Helen," and the wretched young fellow dared make no remonstrance, but the walk was uncomfortable in the extreme, and when Helen joined him he found it even worse.

Once or twice the girl, glancing at his moody abstracted face, stifled a sigh; her heart often ached now, but she would give no sign; she was a gentlewoman not only by birth but in feeling, and she had the courage which leads martyrs smiling to their gruesome deaths, and impels men to risk liberty, life or limb for the love and honour of country.

To Cora's dismay she found her presence was not required either in dining or drawing-room that evening.

"Can it be they guess? Do they know anything?" she questioned of herself as she sat alone in her apartment, and breaking in upon her reverie came Rhea's voice from the school-room,—

"Mimi, you are not to go to Miss Swannell; mother does not approve your excessive friendship, and I think in a few days she will leave us. She is neither nice nor good, and wants to take Bernard away from Helen."

"I don't care if she does; Cora is a deal nicer than Helen, and you are an ugly beast for telling mother tales; I'll warn Cora."

Then the door was closed with a bang, and in the centre of the room stood the little governess, her face ablaze with demoniacal fury, her hands clenched, her eyes flaming as she muttered,—

"So! I am to go, to be sent away in disgrace, and Mademoiselle Rhea is the cause! My child, you will find me a hard creditor when the day of reckoning comes; and these dull, heavy one-idea people will thwart me! Will they! Then they do not yet know of what stuff my father's daughter is made! I will risk all on one throw—it is worth the chance."

Catching up a light wrap she stole downstairs, waiting with patience for the appearance of Bernard; he never stayed long over his wine, it being his custom each evening to walk on the terrace which ran the length of the library before joining the ladies; his mother was specially engaged with the vicar's wife, his father talking politics with the vicar, so that Cora had little to fear from them.

Presently he came out; she halted in her nook until he drew near, then darting forward she laid a small light hand upon his arm, saying scarcely above her breath,—

"Mr. Bernard! oh, Mr. Bernard! I must speak to you—and at once."

He was startled; the blood was coursing madly through his veins—she was so fair, so dear, he longed to catch her close and kiss her fast. But constraining himself to speak calmly, he asked,—

"What is it? You know I am always at your service."

"Oh, I beg for nothing," she wailed, "but I felt I could not go without saying good-bye."

"Good-bye!" he echoed, "what do you mean—Cora, why are you sobbing so?"

"Because I am leaving you all—this dear, happy home—to go out into a world which has never been kind to me! Because, after to-morrow I am a penniless girl with only the river as a refuge before her."

"Great Heaven! Cora, you are either mad or I am dreaming."

"No, no; it is all true! I heard them talking together; they said I must go; and poor as I am I will not wait until I am driven away in disgrace."

"Why should you be driven away! It must be a horrible mistake; or is it that I love you too well! Cora, you know it—and you have learned to love me."

CHAPTER IV.

HE stretched out his arms to her, and still sobbing she allowed him to clasp her to his breast.

"Oh," she moaned, "it is hard, it is hard! but I must not murmur against my lot—I sinned in loving you and for that sin must suffer."

"You shall not go," he cried, carried out of himself by the tumult of his feelings. "I cannot believe my people would do you such foul injustice. If either must suffer I will be the one; the fault is all mine. Oh, my darling! my darling, how can I bear to let you slip out of my life!"

She wanted something more definite, and with a view to gaining her end went on plaintively,—

"In a little while you will forget me—Lady Helen is so good I needs must appear dark beside her—and oh! with all my heart I hope that you will be very happy—as for me," she paused; her face was still half hidden on his breast, but she caught a glimpse of a tall figure entering one of the library windows—it was Helen, and she had gauged that gentle, noble nature well. With a little deft movement she slipped from Bernard's arms, flying along the terrace until she reached the window by which her victim had entered. There she paused feigning breathlessness, and Bernard joining her, caught her by the wrists, asking hoarsely,—

"What are you going to do, Cora! You shall not leave me thus. What are your plans?"

"I have none; oh, let me go away whilst I have strength and courage. I was always such a coward—and I fear death, yet not so much as the dreary life into which you will never enter any more—"

"Cora! oh, my heart's darling, do you think I will let you leave me thus! You are more to me than all beside—let me beg Helen for my freedom—she does not love me as you love."

Inside a woman stood with rigid face and agonized eyes, with arms dropped slackly by her side, and in her heart the cry,—

"Heaven help me—I am forsaken."

"Oh," said Cora's voice. "I do not know how that may be; I only feel I could never do her so bitter a wrong, or win happiness by another woman's misery. And however long I might live, however great that poor beauty you have been pleased to praise, I never could be worthy you. I am all unfit to be your wife."

"I will never call another woman by that name," he cried. "Cora, I have never loved Helen—"

"Oh, hush, hush! You break my heart! This is more bitter than death," groaned the listener; but the pitiless voice did not cease.

"She has seen and accepted the fact from the first; our marriage was arranged by our people, we were merely puppets in their hands—now I refuse to be coerced. I choose for myself; I do not suppose for an instant my father will consent to our union, but even should he prove obdurate, I am young, have many influential friends, and can work for you when I have found the work to do."

That prospect had no charm for Cora, who interrupted him in a tone of meek resignation,—

"No, no dear Bernard, not for me shall you lose all that makes life good for you. I would rather die than hurt you—and so good-bye," but just as she tendered a little hand a voice said,—

"You need not say good-bye; I have heard all—Bernard you are free. It is true I—I do not love you, as does this poor child. I hope you will be very happy," and then Helen had glided by them, allowing Bernard no chance for speech; but her words, "I do not love you," carried comfort to him; he did not see her face as she uttered them, and only Cora knew how much she suffered, what wrong she did her own loyal heart.

"Free! I cannot believe it yet—free a without dishonour. How generous Helen is! Cora, you will not send me away now!"

"Not of my own will; but oh! what will Sir John say! Who will tell him?"

The question a trifle sobered Bernard. "I suppose I must," he answered; but when

he went to his own room that night he found a line in Helen's hand,—

"Leave everything to me; I think I may assure you there is nothing to fear."

"She is a brick," he thought gratefully; "but what a good thing for us both that we discovered our mistake in time," and on her knees before her open window knelt a woman dry-eyed, with upturned tortured face, moaning to her wrung heart,—

"Forsaken! forsaken! Would Heaven that I were dead."

The next day there was a dreadful scene with Sir John, but Helen bore the first outburst of his rage with a composure and dignity which almost seemed to confirm her words.

"I think it all for the best; Bernard and I are not meant for man and wife—you think I love him—well, I do, but not enough to spoil his life and mine."

Then she pleaded for Cora in tender womanly fashion, spoke of her resolve to go away, of her struggle with and victory over herself, of her pathetic words to Bernard, until, in spite of himself, Sir John was touched, and when she finished thus,—

"I do not care what the gossips may say. Nothing shall induce me to marry my cousin," he answered vexedly,—

"If that is the case it matters little what woman he weds so that she is pure and a lady. Send the culprits to me."

She found Bernard in the library.

"Go to your father," she said, quietly, "and I will presently bring Cora to you; I bid you hope;—but she could not stay to hear his thanks, that was beyond even her strength."

Trembling with excitement, which others construed into fear, Cora entered Sir Julian's presence, her lover advancing to meet her, and taking her by the hand, he said,—

"Father, this is my wife."

"With or without my permission! You take a high hand, young man. Miss Swannell, what have you to say that can justify you in stealing away my niece's lover; in teaching him forgetfulness of honour and truth?"

"Nothing," she sobbed, hiding her face on Bernard's shoulder. "Oh, do not think I meant to wrong him and Lady Helen, or that I meditated the betrayal of your trust. I do not hope for pardon, I only pray you to let me go in peace—and let all the blame be upon me—not upon your son."

"That is utter rot!" cried Sir John. "I don't suppose you did the wooing; Bernard is even more to blame than you." (His manner was fast softening—the sight of her beauty, coupled with her distress, touched the fatherly heart.) "What do you purpose doing when you leave here? Are you going to Mr. Swannell?"

She shook her head.

"I cannot be a burthen upon him;" then, suddenly looking up, her pretty eyes full of tears, she added, "Do not question me about my future, I can tell you nothing; only, when I am gone, try to think a little kindly of one who never thought to injure you or yours. For all your goodness to me I thank and bless you. I have been very happy."

She paused, her voice all shaken with emotion, and the Baronet said,—

"Bernard, are you sure of yourself? Are you confident you love this girl?"

"Yes; with all my heart I do."

His words stabbed Helen to the heart.

"And you, Helen. Is it for your best happiness your contract should be broken?"

"It is."

"Then, Bernard, you must please yourself; but if, in the time to come, either you or your wife regret this hour's work, do not reproach me for my weakness."

Then, as he was never a man who did things by halves, he bade Cora go to him and, as he kissed her, said,—

"My dear, be to him a good wife, and you shall never complain in future that I was less than father to you. Here, take your sweetheart, comfort her; she is trembling like a beaten child."

And no one noticed that Helen had escaped.

Up to her room she dragged her weary steps. Her work was over, her sacrifice complete; she longed to steal to some remote spot, there to die of her bleeding wounds. Only life was so strong within her—so pitilessly strong. Yet in all, through all, she thanked Heaven she had been able to place Bernard and his happiness first. Believing, as she did, that Cora was loyal, loving, pure, she thought,—

"He has chosen wisely. She has all that men most prize; whilst I—I never could be aught but ugly in his eyes. Oh! what a blind fool I was to dream he could love me, and how bitterly I am punished for my folly."

When Lady Barstowe heard the news she rose up in her wrath.

"I never will call that girl my daughter, never receive her into my heart; she has usurped Helen's place. She would not have cared to do so had Bernard's prospects been less good." And she turned a deaf ear to Sir John's remonstrances. To Cora her manner was frigid in the extreme. "I cannot wish you happiness," she said, "nor do I believe you will enjoy it, because you do not deserve it. But, as Sir John has accepted you, so I outwardly will do the same; there shall be no scandal; but let me see you as little as you can."

And Cora had heard with drooped head; but when the door had closed upon her visitor she started up, her hands fiercely clenched, her face white with rage.

"Your day now, but mine will come; and then, my lady, I will have a heavy reckoning with you!"

Naturally the change of brides caused a great deal of gossip; but everybody was agreed that Cora would make a most delightful Mrs. Barstowe, and of course the Lady Helen could in no way compare favourably with her. So preparations for the wedding (which was to be solemnised in July) went on apace, and now that Sir John had yielded to Cora's fascinations he rapidly became attached to her.

She was clever, she had such an innocent babyish face, was so affectionate and deferential that he thought, "After all Bernard has not made a bad choice. Of course I would rather have called Helen daughter, but Cora is a dear little soul, when one knows her well, and she will make him happy."

Mr. Swannell came over from Baden for the ceremony, arriving the day before; and, as he and his daughter had so long been separated it was natural they should desire a long and private interview.

One of the reception-rooms was therefore devoted to their service, and the most curious of eavesdroppers could have gleaned nothing of their conversation by pausing at the door, for they conversed almost in whispers.

Mr. Swannell, a handsome, distinguished-looking man (he had once been a gentleman, but was now a card-sharper) congratulated his daughter on her skill "in hooking such a big fish," adding that once safely Bernard's wife she could give her "always affectionate father material assistance."

Cora smiled strangely.

"Had I been a plain child you would long ago have left me upon the world's charity; but seeing I had beauty you thought to repair your fallen fortunes through me. I have done well for myself; but I do not consider it my duty (certainly it is not my inclination) to beggar myself on your behalf or to risk exposure through you. See, here papa, you cannot live in England, you are too well known, lots of people meeting would recognise you as the man who was kicked out of his various clubs some years ago for cheating at cards, and who narrowly escaped punishment for forgery. That is why I proposed to be married in this deadly hole. I won't be thwarted at the last moment, and when I leave en route for Spain you will start for Baden. You are on no account to visit me on my return unless I expressly send for you. For the rest, I shall allow you a pound a week."

"A beggarly pound! Cora, I wonder you have the audacity to offer me such a paltry sum when, if I chose to speak, I could upset all your matrimonial arrangements."

"But you will not," confidently, "because to a

man who, like yourself, has lived so many years by his wits alone, a small nest egg is a veritable godsend."

It was useless to argue with her, this pretty, unprincipled daughter, who was as equally selfish and much more avaricious than he. So, reluctantly, he agreed to her terms, on the morrow giving her with an air of fatherly resignation into Bernard's keeping, smiling grimly to think of the bridegroom's bitter awakening.

CHAPTER IV.

A YEAR went fleetly by, and as yet Bernard had not repented his marriage. There were one or two things he would have liked altered in his wife. She was just a trifle too fond of admiration, just a thought too coquettish; but then she was very young and very pretty; and because he loved her with blind unreasoning passion he never found it hard to forgive her trivial errors, especially as she reserved her sweetest smiles for him.

Then their child was born. To Bernard it was a disappointment on account of its sex, yet he loved the baby-girl because Cora was her mother, and it troubled him that she should show so little pride in, or affection for, the mite.

With Sir John Mrs. Bernard was now chief favourite; but between Lady Barstowe and her daughter-in-law there was armed neutrality, whilst Rhea displayed silent hostility.

Thus matters stood when a telegram reached the young couple informing them of Sir John's sudden and dangerous illness, and begging them to go to Barstowe with all despatch.

Cora's eyes glistened as she read the news; but she was a clever actress, and did nothing which might betray her true feelings to Bernard, who deeply loved his father.

They travelled by express to Barstowe; but arrived too late to receive the Baronet's blessing. Then followed the sad, heavy days, during which Lady Barstowe sat like one stunned, or least her head upon Helen's shoulder moaning as a hurt animal; and Cora, taking the reins in her small hands, managed the household with authority and skill.

After the funeral the will was read in the presence of the assembled friends. It was very simple and explicit. It had not been in Sir John's power to bequeath his widow more than the settlements made upon her at her marriage (she, herself had been "a penniless lass with a long pedigree") and each of the three girls would come into a fortune of two thousand pounds on attaining their majority.

To Bernard went the residue of the property, and the whole estate; "but," his father added, "I trust he will in all things consider his mother's happiness, and his sisters' future welfare. The Dower House is my wife's, so long as she needs it; but I have such faith in my son's affection that I do not believe he will allow his mother to end her days except beneath the roof which has so long sheltered her."

Cora's face was hidden behind her black fan as she heard these words, and it was instinct with purpose.

The next day when Bernard and she were together alone she told him that she had telegraphed for her maid, the nurse, and baby to join them at once, adding,—

"This is now your home, I believe, Bernard!"

"Yes, but we need not dwell too much upon that fact, wife; I should not like my mother to feel too keenly the difference which my father's death has made to her in such matters; and I am sure you and she can live together in amity."

"I must be sole mistress of my own home," returned Cora resolutely, "and I think it best for young people to have a separate establishment. Of course the Dowager Lady Barstowe will be a welcome visitor—but she has the Dower House, and to that she must remove with the girls—excepting Mimi, of course; she was never horrid to me."

He stared at her as though he thought her demented, then he said,—

"You never mean that you wish me to drive my mother out of her own home?"

"Our home, if you please, not hers any longer. Do you suppose I forget the thousand-and-one insults she has heaped upon me! Or that I have ever forgiven them! I am the reigning Lady Barstowe now, not the poor despised governess. Oh, I have a heavy debt to pay, and I shall pay it."

He could not believe her in earnest. His Cora, his wife, the mother of his little innocent child; and with a mocking laugh she said,—

"Oh! it is time my lady learned something of the truth; between us—to use a convenient vulgarism—there is no love lost—and in my own home I will reign supreme."

A terrible scene ensued between husband and wife; alas! it was the first of many. Each strove for mastery, and Bernard in his love for his mother endeavoured with might and main to have all things pleasant and peaceful for her. But in a thousand different ways Cora contrived to make Lady Barstowe's life miserable, thwarting her in all things; being harsh in her manner to Rhea and Dulcie, insolent towards Helen. And very soon the climax came. She had spoken rudely to her mother-in-law in the presence of visitors, so that when the latter had gone Rhea with an indignant flush upon her young face remonstrated with her, ending with the words,—

"If Bernard had been here you would not have dared to insult her."

Quick as lightning Cora sprang to her feet, with angry hand striking the girl across the cheek. She would have repeated the blow, but Helen was too swift for her; catching her by the wrist she held her firmly.

"For shame, Cora, for shame! Are you possessed of a devil that you make the home so wretched for us all, that you presume to strike your sister, and in her mother's presence!"

Like a fury Cora answered,—

"She insulted me in my own house, and I will not endure it. I am mistress here; you all remain on sufferance; if my conduct does not please the Dowager Lady Barstowe I would advise her to remove at once to her proper quarters—the Dower House."

Lady Barstowe, who had been quietly crying, now rose; the tears were wet upon her cheeks, but her manner was dignified, and in her eyes was the majesty of grief.

"I will go," she said very steadily, "since in my son's home there is no room for me. May you deal more kindly by him than you have dealt by me. I regret that I must ask shelter for myself and children until our house is ready for us; believe me, so far as we can we will obliterate ourselves."

She moved towards the door followed by her daughters, and Helen, releasing Cora, hastened to her side; as Mimi passed Cora the latter said,—

"Not you, Mimi, dear; you have always been my friend, you shall remain with me."

There was dead silence a moment, all save Cora wondering how the child would reply; the mother's heart beat painfully, because always she had loved the little vixenish woman. Now she spoke with an effort.

"I am going with mother; I could not stay with you now I have found you out. Rhea was right, I was wrong. You are cruel and deceitful. I will try to hate you just as much as once I loved you."

"So!" said Cora through her pretty clenched teeth, "you have gone over to the enemy! Very well—I shall remember that, and not to your advantage."

"Melodrama overdrawn!" was Rhea's mocking remark as they filed from the room, and up in Helen's boudoir they began to discuss their future.

"Dear auntie," said Helen, kneeling by her with her arm about her waist, it would be so very, very painful for you to remain in Barstowe, to live within her gates, in daily sight of her, and yet to remember all the while what wrong she has done you. Let us all go to Sandsea; it

is high time I knew more of my neighbours and tenants. There we shall be free and happy."

"Oh, Helen! Helen! I think my heart is broken, and I am so afraid for my boy. She is an evil and bitter woman; I always said that, even when you and your uncle held her dear, and Mimi worshipped her."

"So you did," cried Mimi, "and you made me angry; but oh! how I wish you had not guessed right; it hurts me to know she is so wicked. Mother, darling, let us go with Helen," and her sisters so joined in her entreaty that Lady Barstowe hesitated. It was hard to leave the place where she had spent so many happy years; but it would be harder still to endure Cora's insolence, to feel that her dearly loved son was no longer her son, having "got him a wife." With a passionate burst of tears she threw her arms round Helen's neck. "Let us go; you are wiser than I—but, dear child, my heart is broken. If only John could know—oh! but, thank Heaven! all this is hidden from him."

Bernard was furious when he learned the truth, but finding Cora obdurate he tried to reason with her, declaring that all the county would "cut" her if she drove his mother away. She smiled serenely,—

"You are mistaken; a mother-in-law is always more or less an element of discord in a household—and I am somewhat of a favourite in society—your mother is old, and never could have been very well favoured, whilst I am young and pretty, I may say so much without vanity; to a pretty woman the world is usually lenient."

So it came about that the Lady Helen conveyed her relations to Sandsea, where at least they might live in the atmosphere of peace, and where all that they said or did would be sweetened by mutual love.

Cora was delighted; she cared nothing that by her action she had killed her husband's love, that he saw her now with other eyes, and from the depths of his riven heart loathed what once he adored.

She had won wealth, position, title, and she was happy; she was undisputed mistress in her home, the reigning beauty of the county, and it was infinitely more comfortable to be rid of Bernard's attentions and caresses—so much more amusing to play with other hearts than her own legitimate property.

And Bernard knew this; he read her now as a book, being filled with dreary wonder and a blank despair that ever he could have linked his life to such a heartless, soulless creature.

His only comfort lay in his little helpless child. Ever farther and farther they drifted apart, and always Cora's coquettishness grew more pronounced, but Bernard ceased to remonstrate with her, knowing how vain it was; only once, gripping her shoulders he said,—

"Do not go too far, for if you disgrace me I will kill you!"

She was frightened; but she hid her fear well as she answered with her cruel, mocking laugh,—

"You may trust me to take proper care of your name, *mon ami*. I am not the sort of woman to risk title and luxury for the sakes of love."

He knew now the truth concerning her father and herself; she had shamelessly told him the whole story as a joke, guessing that for pride's sake, for the credit of his family he never would divulge it. Worse still, she confessed her mother, previous to her marriage, had been a notorious music-hall dancer, with whom respectable women would not consort.

He thought of Helen—the prize he had flung so carelessly by.

"Thank Heaven she never regarded me save as a brother," was the reflection with which he comforted himself, not believing or even guessing how bitter life was for her because of him.

Sometimes he went to Sandsea, but he felt awkward and constrained even with his mother; the memory of the indignities hurled upon her by his wife, of her ignominious expulsion from his home, kept him silent and abashed.

Most of the old servants had left the hall; he seemed as a stranger in his own place; the cook, an old and valued servant had said in "giving notice"—

"I am used to serving ladies only, and since my

dear mistress has gone I am going too; Lady Helen has consented to take me, and with her I shall be happy."

Cora broke into passionate words; cook heard her calmly to the end, then said,—

"Well, my lady, if you're a born lady I'm thankful I'm not; it is sorry I should be to forget myself and my manners as you do," and she left young Lady Barstowe in triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Barstowes were in town, for the season had commenced, and Cora was creating quite a sensation by her beauty, her flirtations, her dainty, delicate costumes.

She lived only for admiration, love could not touch her heart, and yet there were those who charmed by her flower-like face, her innocent-seeming eyes, her pretty ways, laid their best affections at her feet, not guessing what fun she extracted from their sorrows.

She was a modern Circe; she loved to see men transformed if not to beasts yet to idiots for her unworthy sake—yet her victims were the last to believe this of her, she seemed so daintily child-like, so snowily pure.

The baby had been left at Barstowe, whither Bernard went once each week to assure himself of her welfare. To him Cora made great fun of his "silly love" for the child; to her friends she deplored the fact that duty called her so much from her darling, and she looked so pathetic as she lifted her big blue eyes that everybody agreed she was a dear affectionate little soul, that Bernard was a bear, and her coquettishness were the outcome of pure animal spirits, free from all malice or mischief.

In the train of admirers she counted one, a Frenchman, Polydore St. Cyr. He was young, foolish, passionate; he adored her.

Forgetting all else but her beauty and his insane affection he followed where she led, was seen with her at all fashionable places of resort until tongues began to wag, and significant glances were exchanged when he lingered by her, imprudently making her conspicuous by his devotion.

It was weeks before Bernard discovered this; he did not often appear now in public with his wife, and it was quite by chance that Polydore's folly was revealed to him.

He overheard two men at his club talking whilst he himself was screened by a newspaper from observation.

"St. Cyr is gone on the little Barstowe," said the first speaker; "but he shows awful taste in dogging her steps, and making her his everlasting theme at club or table. What the deuce is Barstowe about that he takes such small care of his wife! By Jingo, she does go the pace in her flirtations."

"Oh, she is harmless enough," responded the other. "I don't believe she knows how to coquette but she errs somewhat on the side of kindness. For my part I think she regards St. Cyr as a brother."

"Impossible! His devotion is just a thought too pronounced. I can only say that, were I in Barstowe's place, I should not allow him access to my wife; and he is a fool to play fast and loose with her reputation."

Then somebody else came in, and the conversation changed. Bernard sat in a white fury, scarcely able to restrain himself until the two men, who were evidently acquaintances, had gone. Then, rising, he rushed down the steps, making his way home to administer that rebuke Cora so richly merited.

Not for a moment did he believe she would wrong him actually. Alas! alas! he knew that the fair form enshrined a heart no love, no devotion could ever touch. She valued her position and wealth too highly to sacrifice them—even supposing she could have loved any creature so well as herself. But he was resolved she should not make his name a target for ridicule, or incur suspicion by her frivolity for the child's sake.

To his gratification he found her alone; and,

repeating the substance of what he had heard, ended with the words,—

"You shall not make yourself or me ridiculous, so from to-day I forbid you to know St. Cyr."

She lifted insolent eyes to his.

"I may make myself ridiculous and create a scandal by ignoring my chief friend utterly! I decline to do so."

"Cora, for Heaven's sake think what you are saying and doing. I have given you an honourable name, keep it clean. I do you the justice to believe that you are as indifferent to St. Cyr as to me, but others may not be so merciful in their judgment, so you must abide by my decision."

"You should have married a Puritan," she retorted, disdainfully; "your notions are really too strict, my dear husband. Rest assured I never shall forfeit the prize it was so hard to win; but neither shall I sink to the heavy respectability of the typical British matron, nor make friends for myself according to your directions. Positively, I refuse to submit my will to yours in anything."

She rose, laughing. He caught her by the shoulders, holding her fast whilst he glowered down upon her.

"What was there in you that I should wreck my whole life for you?" he demanded, hoarsely; "there are other women as beautiful to look upon, with their pink and white, their golden hair and sweet blue eyes; are they all as soulless, as heartless as you, I wonder? Cora, have a care; do not drive me too far for there are times when I am tempted to kill you, that you may no further dishonour yourself and me!"

She was a little frightened then, though she recovered her audacity when he set her free; and, hastening to the door, she made a contemptuous moue—a contemptuous gesture, whilst her light laughter came borne to him as she tripped through the corridor.

He flung his arms aloft.

"Great Heaven, what a fool I have been! Helen! Helen! you are fully avenged."

That night little Lady Barstowe danced often with Polydore St. Cyr. Helen was present, and she took a malicious delight in wounding that loyal heart, outraging her delicate sense of right and wrong.

Never had she been so reckless; it was as though she were possessed of a mocking devil, and bent, if not on her own destruction, on that of her wretched admirer.

But she just a little exceeded the bounds of Bernard's patience. A man, who held him in high esteem, considered it his duty to report her conduct (he did not believe in her innocence), so that when she woke in the morning she found her maid busily engaged in packing her belongings.

"What is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct?" demanded my lady.

"Oh, pardon, miladi; Sir Bernard bade me prepare for to travel," answered the maid deprecatingly. "He said miladi would go to Barstowe to-day."

As she spoke Bernard himself entered.

"You can go, Clochette," he said to the girl, who secretly espoused his cause; and when she had disappeared, turning to Cora, he remarked,—

"You are doubtless surprised by this sudden movement; but I have this morning received a communication which shows me the necessity of at once removing you from scenes of temptation. We start at three."

She sat up flushed and angry.

"You have been listening to Helen's lies about me. What a pity it is you did not marry your estimable but hideous cousin!"

"I have not seen Lady Helen for months, as you are well aware, and she, being the soul of honour, would not stoop to repeat the shameful truth—would not seek to come between man and wife."

"Ah, no! the Lady Helen is an angel; but she is a difficult woman for all that. Do you think if she had my beauty she would be quite so unlikable in character and dress? Bah! she knows her only chance of settlement must come through a parson or an impetuous younger son. Being what I am I utterly refuse

to bury myself at Barstowe, with the season still at its height; I remain here."

But for once Bernard was victor. Seating himself beside her he summoned Clochette to finish packing, issuing his orders in a manner that allowed of no remonstrance or hesitation.

He called in all accounts, promptly settling them, although the amounts fairly startled him; and placing the servants on "board wages" left town that afternoon with his rebellious, hysterical wife.

He had cancelled all her engagements, alleging as an excuse her sudden indisposition; but carefully as he managed all things, keenly as he watched her, she contrived to despatch a note to Polydore St. Cyr deploring her departure, accusing her husband of gross cruelty, and expressing a hope that he (Polydore) would presently visit her at Barstowe, "where she had no friends and no congenial society."

She cared less than nothing for him; but it was "fun to fool him to the top of his bent." Greater fun to plague the man whose name she bore, and without excitement she could not exist.

They lived in a state of armed neutrality for some days after their return home; then the storm burst.

Polydore followed his divinity to Barstowe, having been notified by her that Bernard was absent.

In burning language the wretched youth avowed his passion, Cora listening with covered face, and every appearance of distress. When he paused for sheer lack of breath she said, sobbingly,—

"Oh, what shall I do? I never thought to harm you. I have always, always liked you so well. I thought of you as my friend. I did not dream that you were my lover. I am fenced about by my wifely dignity. I should have been sacred to you; and now, now after all my husband was right, and with regret I say we must never meet again."

"Never!" he ejaculated with all the theatricality of his nation. "Great Heaven! how then shall I live! You say you send me away with regret. Oh, Cora, can I not read your heart by my own? Have not your eyes looked love into mine a hundred times? If you were free what would you say then?"

"If I were free!" in a weary tone, "Ah! that would be so different; but I am bound hand and foot. Do not think that Sir Bernard is actually unkind to me; but he does not understand me. His thoughts are not my thoughts, his ways are not my ways. Why, he hurried me back to this dreary place simply because he was—oh! I am ashamed to tell you; but he was jealous of the little kindnesses you showed me."

"Cora, beloved! tell me why did you marry this English bear?"

"Oh, why? why? Because I was terribly poor, and my father urged me to sacrifice myself to satisfy his needs. I had not then met a man I could love, or perhaps I had not so weakly yielded."

It was unfortunate for my lady that her lord should have returned unexpectedly, owing to his horse falling suddenly lame. Now he stood in the ante-room, hearing and seeing all, for the curtains, which usually screened the doorway, were open on account of the heat. And as Bernard listened his face was not good to see. There was hate in the flashing eyes, a stern, murderous purpose about the fast set lips, and the clenched hands looked capable of any deed of violence.

As Cora's voice faltered he ground out a dreadful oath, and dashing into the room confronted her and her silly lover.

She was frightened, and screamed aloud, so that Polydore threw an arm about her as though he sought to protect her.

In an instant Bernard's hand was at his throat. With one quick movement he tore him from Cora's side, and wordless, voiceless with rage and shame dragged him from the room, propelling him through the hall, finally dismissing him in most ignominious fashion.

At the foot of the steps the Frenchman paused to shake his flat melodramatically, whilst he loudly declared "he would have satisfaction."

"That is what I desire above all things," retorted

Bernard; "arrange matters as you will and with as little reference to me as possible."

Then white and stern he returned to Cora. She began to sob.

"Bernard, I have been foolish but not wicked. Do not make me a by-word amongst my friends. After all I have done you no injury."

"Silence woman!" he broke in, fiercely. "I will not hear you because Heaven knows I cannot believe your most solemn oath. Nothing but blood can wash the stain from my name; yet because you are the mother of my innocent child as far as lies in my power I will spare you; but leave me now."

CHAPTER VII.

"MY DEAR HELEN,—

"To you, and you only, can I confide my trouble. For reasons upon which it is not necessary to enter I am compelled to meet Polydore St. Cyr, who has challenged me. To-morrow I cross to Ostend in company of a friend, and not knowing whether I shall survive the duel I have made my will, which is lodged with Sardou; by it I leave you and my mother joint guardians of little Meta. At my mother's decease the charge devolves wholly upon you, and for the sake of old times you will not refuse to accept it. I have also made additional provision for the girls."

"Lady Barstowe is to have access to Meta, for the time allowed by law,—a period of seven years—after that she is to see her child only in the presence of yourself or my mother. If she does not rigidly observe this last instruction she forfeits the best part of her income."

"Thanking you for past goodness, and for anticipated kindness, I must hasten to an end. The woman who brings this to you will also have care of Meta until she is delivered into your charge. She is trustworthy, and is called Clochette; she will make all necessary excuses or explanations to my mother. For the rest, Heaven help me, who can no longer help myself. Good-bye, dear Helen; whether I live or die remember that above all other women I esteemed you."

"BERNARD."

Helen turned her piteous eyes upon Clochette. "What does it mean?" she questioned. "Oh, little one (pressing baby to her breast) could not you bridge the gulf?"

"Merci!" cried Clochette, "miladi hates the darling; it is Sir Bernard that worships her; it is himself that is wretched. Ah! so profoundly that miladi cares not at all; she has no heart; she laughs to see men suffer! She would laugh while rivers of blood flowed for her sake—she is a devil!"

Helen still nursing the child scarcely heeded her, but when the maid's voice died out, said,—

"My aunt and cousin are out; dare I leave baby to you, and trust you to make all necessary explanations to Lady Barstowe? She is not strong, and any shock may prove fatal to her."

"You may trust me," the maid said quietly, "to miladi I return no more, if you will let me stay with the *petite mademoiselle*. But—but—pardon—what you go to do?"

"It is best you should not know, Clochette; now help me to dress; if I start at once I may catch the up-train, and Heaven knows I have little time to lose."

She dressed rapidly, all the while giving instructions to the maid, even in her hurry forgetting nothing that could conduce to the child's welfare or her aunt's comfort. Then she was driving from the house whilst Clochette, watching her go, muttered,—

"Why are men such fools! Why did he not marry her; she has the heart of a woman, the soul of a saint."

It was late in the afternoon when Helen reached Barstowe to find Cora sulkily enumerating her wrongs on her jewelled fingers. The time for pity was over; after all Helen was but a woman, and her heart was torn with fear for the man she yet loved, so that almost roughly she bade Cora dress and go with her.

"But where?" questioned little Lady Barstowe, "and why?"

"To Ostend, to witness the death of your husband or Polydore St. Cyr."

"Pooh, the affair will end in smoke," returned Cora, "and each will learn wisdom through it. You don't suppose Helen that I love this French cavalier?"

"I would not do you the gross injustice to believe you capable of loving any but yourself."

"You are growing quite astute. But suppose I refuse to accompany you?"

"Then I will inform the proper authorities of this meditated breach of the law. I shall not hide your part in the transaction, and you best know if you can come out stainless from a public inquiry."

Cora was no match for this resolute, white-faced woman; just because she had always seen Helen gentle and slow to anger she had grown to believe her incapable of extreme emotion, and was not only surprised but frightened by the change in her.

Trembling and cowed she began her hasty preparations, Helen permitting her no rest until they were fairly on their journey. Cora sat in her corner, sulky, tearful, mutinous, yet unconsciously conscious the whole while of her impotence; from time to time she glanced at Helen, but there was never any change in the white, set face; never any sign of emotion in the grave steady eyes. It was Helen who managed everything throughout, neither looking for nor appealing to Cora for assistance; in fact she felt that between them speech was impossible.

They never rested until the trip was completed, although Cora pleaded fatigue.

"There is no time to lose," said Helen coldly, "when our task is accomplished we may think of our own comfort."

She felt such a profound contempt for her beautiful companion; stripped of every good or womanly attribute Cora held no longer any charm for her, could exercise no power over her. Even when in her weariness the beauty broke into futile sneers she was scarcely touched by them.

"You always loved Bernard," said Cora. "I saw that when you gave him up to me—gave him to me simply because you could not hold fast your possession. You preach to me, but you are as guilty as I—more so, because you love my husband."

The steady dark eyes met hers unflinchingly.

"It is true that Bernard was, and is, dearer to me than he supposes. Hoping to win happiness for him I offered him release; now I know I had better have done him to death than have left him to the mercy of a cruel woman, who does her best to bring him to the level of a beast. Oh! Heaven forgive me—I feel that his moral ruin lies at my door."

Now they were in Ostend, and it was not a difficult matter to discover Bernard's hotel, or to extract all necessary information from the garrulous proprietor, who was a Frenchman.

"Monsieur had but left the place a few minutes; he was in company of a friend. Was he looking well? Scarcely; he had a worried expression, and before going had paid his bill in full, saying it was quite uncertain whether he should return or no."

But Helen gleaned by judicious inquiries the way he had taken, and thanking the man, turned to follow in his wake.

Cora declared she could walk no further, they must drive; but Helen, taking her by the wrist, whispered fiercely,—

"Would you have this affair bruited abroad? For his sake if not your own observe secrecy, and hurry! hurry! even now we may be too late."

In a secluded spot, on a narrow strip of grass were four men; one was white of face, fixed of purpose; secretly he prayed that he might fall because nothing good was left to him. His hand was steady, his heart did not beat more rapidly than its wont, though it was filled with rage against his excited, nervous antagonist, and a sick scorn of the woman he called wife. The signal to fire was all but given, when a sudden shrill scream was heard, and the next instant two women appeared on the scene.

The first was little, fair, beautiful, and as she ran forwards she cried,—

"Oh, stop! stop!—do not shoot! I—I am so afraid of pistols!"

The conclusion of her speech was ludicrous even at such a moment, but she had distracted Bernard's attention, and Polydore St. Cyr, forgetful of honour and all else but his illicit passion, raising his weapon fired point blank at his enemy.

But his bullet missed its billet, thanks to a woman's devotion; seeing his action Helen had sprung forward, flung herself upon Bernard's breast, and so received the shot in her left arm, which fell helpless to her side.

Still clinging about him with her right she turned her face towards the foe; he was shivering with fear, writhing beneath the contemptuous angry words of the second. He declared he was ready to shake hands with Barstowe, and deeply deplored wounding the lady.

Bernard in his fury at the injury Helen had received would have insisted on a renewal of hostilities but for her pleadings.

"Take me where I may rest," she said in conclusion, "my arm is painful and I feel faint"; so in some wise Bernard conveyed his wife and cousin to his hotel. Where Polydore went or how he fared no one troubled to inquire.

To the doctor who attended her Helen told a simple story of her wound which effectually shielded Bernard and St. Cyr from blame; and after being made as comfortable as circumstances would allow she was called to the conference between husband and wife.

Cora declared that after the violence displayed by Bernard she did not wish to reside with him for awhile; that in fact she was frightened; and she gave a lengthy list of imaginary grievances, which he would not even trouble to refute.

She alleged that her health had suffered by the strain upon her mind, followed by her hurried wearisome journey, and she wished to recruit it. She would go to her father who was then staying at Lyons; he would be glad to receive her; and Bernard did not say her nay.

She was his wife, but he felt life with her wholly beyond the question; still scandal must not touch her—for the child's sake. At those words Cora's blue eyes brightened with a baleful fire—she knew now how to wound him most cruelly, the weapon was in her hand; she would not scruple to use it.

Without baby she declared she would be insoluble; Clochette had behaved ill towards her, and she would not allow her to remain in her service or to have care of her child. A capable woman should replace her, and convey her charge to her at Lyons.

Then began the stormy contest once more. Bernard declaring that she was unfit to hold such a trust; she roundly protesting she would not yield one right or privilege the law accorded her. Until Meta was seven years old she was her exclusive property, seeing that in nothing had she sinned.

Besides she only proposed spending a brief time abroad. Then, still finding him obdurate, she said,—

"Very well, take away my child, and this woman who is more to you than I have ever been, who shamelessly acknowledges her love for you shall suffer, her name shall be dragged through the mire as you would drag mine—"

"Stop!" cried Bernard, "you have gone too far. You are unworthy to breathe the same air with her; if you harm her in the least thing it will be to your own undoing. Meta is too young to understand your wicked ways or learn evil of you. Take her for awhile, but when I claim her again I claim her for all time. Helen, I pray your pardon for all the insults and wounds showered so lavishly upon you."

Helen rose; there was a dignity in her mien or look Cora never could approach.

"The insults cannot touch me," she said quietly, "since my conscience absolves me; and any fatigue or injury I may have encountered is gladly borne because I believe that by Heaven's help I saved your life. Good-bye, Bernard, I am returning home to-day, and it is not likely we shall meet soon—for my sake do not make your visits frequent!" She coldly glanced at

Cora, as coldly inclined her head, and without further speech went away.

With quiet heroism she hid both her bodily and mental pain, until safe once more under the shelter of her own roof nature would have way, and she utterly collapsed.

For several weeks she was prostrate, whilst Lady Barstowe and the girls tenderly ministered to her.

Meanwhile little Meta had been conveyed to Lyons, where her mother was living a life according to her own individual taste, and Bernard was alone at Barstowe.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCARCELY had Cora settled at Lyons when Polydore St. Cyr followed her. Emboldened by her own imprudence and her evident dislike of her husband he did not for an instant imagine his suit would be unwelcome. He believed his *inamorata* returned his passion; that she would be quite ready to share exile and decent poverty with him, as he would then have endured all things for her sake.

Mr. Swannell eyed him askance as he entered his daughter's *salon*; but a significant glance from that lady drove him away, muttering to himself,—

"Bah! if evil comes of his folly it will be to himself; in matters concerning her own interests Cora is to be trusted."

With much *empressment* St. Cyr approached the young wife, who was looking her fairest in a dainty pale-blue tea-gown, with delicate pink roses at her breast.

As he held her hand his eyes, meeting hers, he said,—

"At last we meet; to me the time of our separation has been an eternity!"

She smiling, answered,—

"How long is it measured by days and hours! Let me consider—six days; let the hours take care of themselves! I always try to forget the governess-chapter of my life. I absolutely cannot calculate now! But it is just six days since you and my liege lord made idiots of yourselves, and you wounded the beautiful Helen. It was a tempest in a tea-cup, *mon ami*, yet how it frightened poor little me!"

This was most decidedly not the reception he had anticipated, but he remembered with something like elation the now hackneyed words of a great man,—

"Oh woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,"

and reflecting that Cora, now relieved from her husband's surveillance, was inclined to dally with him the further to increase his ardour, he said,—

"This is not a time for jesting; you have known all along how dear you are to me; how my life is bound up in you. You do not love Barstowe—you love me!"

She scented danger, as she answered,—

"In Platonic fashion certainly."

"You have made me understand that I was more than friend or brother to you, Cora, do not trifle with me now. Many and many a time you have looked love into my eyes; now I come imploring you to have pity on my pain! to be your own natural self to me! Oh, my darling! my darling!"

"Stop!" cried the little woman, with a show of dignity, "were my husband present he would hotly resent such language. You must remember I am a married woman, consequently fenced about by wifely dignity. If you speak in such a fashion again I must forget we ever were acquaintances."

"Acquaintances!" he echoed in bewilderment.

"We were friends—lovers!"

"Friends, if you will; lovers, never! Oh, you poor foolish boy! has it not all been an innocent, idle flirtation, which has hurt neither of us? Love you, no! And I prefer that henceforth your name should not be coupled with mine; the world is censorious; it might go so far as to say that young Lady Barstowe gave the lion's share of her love to Monsieur St. Cyr. You

and I know that it is false; but the world would need a deal of convincing, and, being convinced 'against its will, would hold the same opinion still!"

He was regarding her with wide wild eyes. This was the woman for whom he had been willing to risk all—for whom he would have borne untold griefs and afflictions. In a terrible fashion he had loved her; but the scales had fallen from his eyes, and as he gazed on the smiling beautiful face he loathed her. The thought was in his heart, and he gave utterance to it.

"You are a devil, a beautiful devil, and therefore most dangerous. May the Virgin forgive me the wrong I meditated against Barstowe, and the evil thoughts I had of him; he had better be dead than wedded to you."

"You are pleased to be complimentary, and for why? Because I have in mercy spared you; have affected to treat your insolent attachment as 'light fire in the veins of a boy!' Now, hear the truth. All along I have despised you for your weakness, affectation, and too openly expressed admiration. More than ever did I scorn you when you confronted Sir Bernard. Your pallid face, your trembling hand, and unsteady eyes proclaimed you coward; and, though a coward myself, I hate a man who is not manly. I was even a little proud of my husband then because he was your exact opposite in all things. Now, go; and if you dare again to enter my presence I will have you thrust out like the veriest scamp!"

Before he could speak in reply she touched a bell, and a maid appearing, she said,—

"Show this person out! And remember, in future, I am not at home to him. If he is troublesome, you know well what to do!"

That was adding insult to injury. The Frenchman turned on her with an oath.

"You vile woman! as I live I will be avenged on you!" And so he left her.

She sank down upon a couch, laughing. "How funny these men are!" she remarked to her own reflection in the opposite mirror; "and how soon one wearies of them! After all I shall not be so sorry to return to Barstowe! Here I am one of a crowd, there I am a notable person, and I like notoriety—I love adulation."

Then, curling herself up on the couch, gave her whole attention to a novel of questionable character, never caring for the evil she had wrought, for the distrust of women she had sown broadcast in St. Cyr's mind. And out in the noisy streets, half aloud, he cursed her, not knowing how soon his curse would fall, or how many good lives it would involve.

That night Cora went to the play, drawing all eyes towards her by the magic of her beauty, the loveliness of her toilet. In the nursery her child lay wallowing, and there was no one near to hush its cries!

In October Cora wrote Bernard that she was returning to Barstowe, before starting on her visiting tour, and the house was placed in readiness for her, although he himself did not intend remaining there after her arrival, save for a day or two, just to shield her from scandal—always for the child's sake.

In the highest of spirits Cora reached England, noting a day in London to make a few additions to her already extensive wardrobe. And just that one day's halt was fatal to her.

The express left Liverpool-street at 2.30 P.M., being due at Barstowe at 5.15. It was fairly filled, but Cora with the nurse and Meta had secured a first class carriage; and the little lady, wrapped in her furs, surrounded by magazines of every description, prepared for a luxurious journey.

The child had fallen asleep, the woman nodded drowsily; she was weary with travel, and worn out by the previous day's excitement. But she woke with a start as Cora flung a book heavily down upon the floor, and saw her lady looking white and frightened; but in answer to her question,—

"Are you ill, my lady?" Cora only shook her head. But a little later she muttered,—

"People have no right to publish such things; religion never should enter a novel."

Then gingerly she picked up the book to read the irritating passage again. It had followed so swiftly on a splendid scene that it had made a profound impression even upon that shallow nature. It ran thus,—

"He retired to rest intoxicated with the night's revelries; anticipating the morrow's pleasure, never dreaming that for him the morrow would not dawn, never hearing the warning voice, 'Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee.'"

Cora rose, looked from the window, heedless that the breeze—which was grateful to her—might harm the delicate child, and the nurse feared to call her attention to this fact, until they were within six miles of home, and nearing a long tunnel. Then she timidly suggested it would be better to close the window, and Cora replied by shutting it noisily. Why had she read those words? Why did they so haunt and trouble her? "Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee."

Death was a horrible thing; she never liked to hear it mentioned; she hated to think that one day her fair face would be cold and rigid for ever, her dainty, delicate body hidden deep beneath the earth, prey for the worms and every loathsome creeping creature."

"Thou fool!" Ah! Merciful Heavens, what was that! A shock, a noise of wild confusion, the mingling of shrieks and groans, as the Barstowe express was telescoped by the up-train—then Cora knew no more.

There had been a mistake in the signals, the line had been telegraphed clear, and alas! alas that error cost many dear. Railway officials, doctors, merciful men and women were speedily on the spot, all engaged in the work of rescue; Bernard was amongst them, his heart torn with anxiety for his child, full of fear for his wife; for now that she might be dead he began to make excuses for her, trying to remember her as he had pictured her.

It was a terrible scene in the tunnel; body after body was dug out from the debris only to be sorrowfully pronounced dead. Some had lost an arm, some a leg, some were battered out of all recognition.

On reaching the first-class carriages a piteous voice was heard crying,—

"Water! water! for God's sake!" and presently a woman and child were brought out. They were both dead, and the baby was Bernard's dearest treasure.

He staggered and seemed about to fall, a great sob rose to his lips, when that piteous voice entreated,—

"Do not leave me here to die—husband—give me drink," and there was Cora lying helpless, but with her beautiful face untouched, unscarred. Gentle hands lifted her, but she shrieked aloud with pain, and all her cry was, "Oh, take me home! take me home!"

His heart was very tender towards her then, and he spoke with infinite gentleness; he held her hand within his own, whilst they prepared her for her journey, and even in her agony she saw that his eyes were dim with unshed tears.

In sad wise she was removed to her home, and conveyed to her own beautiful room, and there the nature of her injuries was discovered. The broken leg in itself was not hopeless, but great doctors, who were summoned hurriedly, said that her internal hurt precluded all chance of recovery, that she had but a few days at most to live.

She heard the verdict with stoical calm; answering all their questions quietly, steadily; but when they were gone she flung out her arms crying,—

"Bernard! Bernard! I have been a wicked woman. I am afraid to die! Oh, send for Helen—if she will forgive me—if she will come to me, even now there may be hope for me."

"Hush! hush dear, this excitement is bad for you—spare your strength until Helen's arrival; she knows your state, and has already telegraphed asking if she may come to you."

(Continued on page 550.)

LEILA VANE'S BURDEN.

—40:—
CHAPTER XXXI.

MARGOT'S feeling when she was alone after that episode in the hall was one of some mystification and undoubted trouble.

She could not shut her eyes to the fact that Mrs. Bernadine's manner to Leila had been distinctly disagreeable; and it had been only too evident to her that her dear girl friend had been deeply hurt by the fact. Leila's brightness had faded away completely in that one moment.

"I am afraid it is going to be a mistake for Mrs. Bernadine to live here," Margot said to herself; "she has been very sweet and nice, but she can be very nasty too. She was most disagreeable this morning, and her eyes had such a funny expression in them. I wonder she does not suggest going away of her own accord; she cannot be too happy having to resign everything to Leila. I begin to understand what mother's mysterious words meant the other day."

There was no immediate mention made between Leila and Margot when they came together an hour or so later of anything that had occurred in the morning.

Margot's quick eyes were pained to see that the clouded and troubled look that had fallen on Leila's face remained there; but though all her heart was stirred by this she was much too full of delicate thought and tact to speak of it.

The two girls went out for a long walk in the afternoon. There had been some sort of suggestion at luncheon that they should drive with Mrs. Bernadine, but Leila, a little to her husband's surprise, objected to this arrangement.

"Margot and I are going to walk to Prescott," she said, quietly. There was an element of coldness in her manner that stung the woman watching her so narrowly like a lash.

It was the first sign of resentment Leila had given as yet, and it was perfectly comprehensible to Mrs. Bernadine and equally objectionable; for though she had fretted beneath Leila's patience and sustained good temper, and had longed so often to break it down, she felt humiliated by the girl's undoubted coldness now it was come.

"To Prescott! It is a little too far, is it not, dear?" Julian asked, conscious of a jarring note somewhere, and, man like, growing slightly cross with the consciousness.

"Oh! it will do us good," Leila said, almost indifferently. Margot, watching her, felt all too sure the indifference was assumed.

Julian continued his lunch in silence after this remark, and Mrs. Bernadine had not uttered a word since her suggestion about the drive had been disposed of.

Margot rushed into conversation, talking of this and of that, but of what she was not quite sure, only eager to do aught in her power to smooth away the present difficulty.

It was not long before Julian responded to her efforts, and there was a pretence of conversation for the rest of the meal.

Leila had a sinking pain at her heart as she saw her husband disappear after lunch without trying to exchange a word with her; and yet, at the same time, she was conscious of some relief, for her thoughts were troubled ones. Something, she hardly knew what, seemed to have fallen over the sweetness and brightness of her life since those few sentences exchanged in the hall in the morning sunshine.

It was not alone the fact of Helen Bernadine's resentful attitude towards herself that hurt her; it was the old phantom of doubt and shame that had been upraised by that one strange speech about Giles Bernadine, and by Margot's careless introduction of Henry Bartlett's name. As though some barrier had been suddenly removed, and a flood let loose, back over the girl's mind rushed the torrent of old thoughts, old difficulties and an old suffering that was touched with a new. She seemed to have gone back utterly into the past.

In her present strained frame of mind, therefore, Leila felt almost glad when she found that Julian would not question her or look into her

eyes and see the trouble that was written there; and yet it was the first time since their marriage that there had been even a suggestion of vexation on his part—the first touch of coldness!

She had walked some distance with Margot before she opened her lips, and then she sighed.

"I am afraid Julian thought me unkind not to have joined his mother in her drive, Margot!" she said, not conscious of how wistful her voice was.

Margot took the girl's little hand and slipped it through her arm.

"Oh, you will soon explain all that away," she said, cheerily.

"I hope so," Leila answered, and she sighed again. "Julian is very sensitive where his mother is concerned, Margot," she said after a little pause; "but I understand his feelings absolutely."

Margot assented to this cheerily also.

"You know Mrs. Bernadine is not like other mothers, Leila. Her life has been, if not extraordinary, at least a little out of the ordinary. She has been spoiled just as if she had been a child all these years. She is spoiled now," Margot said, making her voice and words as light as possible. "I don't think I should ever attach any importance to her moods, Leila, dearest."

"I have done my best to understand them and follow them, Margot."

"I am sure you have; do you need to tell me that you have done everything that duty first and sweetness next has suggested to you?"

Leila pressed the arm that held hers close to her heart.

"Always a comforter, Margot," she said, not very steadily.

They walked on till they reached the end of the grounds, and there Leila paused.

"Perhaps it was not very kind of us to leave Mrs. Bernadine, Midget," she said, in an involuntary way.

"We will go back," Margot cried at once, wheeling round as she spoke. "If we make haste we shall just catch her before she starts. Come along!"

Leila was obliged to laugh here, though her tears sprang to her eyes unbidden.

"Margot, was there ever anyone like you!" she said, tenderly.

Margot laughed too.

"I hope not! One of my pattern is quite enough! Are you equal to a run, Leila?"

But laughing and merry as she was outwardly Margot's thoughts were still considerably disturbed.

"I think this is something for mother to work on," she said to herself as they hastened back towards the house. "I begin to understand now why it was she was so very determined that Mrs. Bernadine should come and stay with us. Dear mother, she sees everything! I wish every other mother was like she is!"

Margot's feeling of regret at Mrs. Bernadine's foolish determination to share her son's home after his marriage was fast deepening into irritation. She had put all her heart into the joy of seeing Leila happy at last, and now a big, a very big, doubt had arisen!

"She has just the manner to hurt Leila in her most vulnerable part—her pride; and, alas! if she chooses she can strike pretty hard at that through Eustace Vane," Margot mused on. "I can only hope her own experience of the man will keep her lips sealed where he is concerned." Margot discovered after a while that she had a little irritation for Julian too. "I have all the sympathy in the world," she said to herself, "with his love for his mother and with his thought for her; but I think he ought to see for himself that a mixed *ménage* cannot be altogether wise or pleasant. It seldom answers when the circumstances are ordinary, and in his case, with so delicate and sensitive a nature as Leila's made more sensitive by the miserable surroundings of her former life, and with a nature so difficult as his mother's, he ought to have seen that a life together must result badly for them if not for himself!"

The house was reached in about half-an-hour after they had left it; but their quest was vain. Both girls were conscious of a little pain (arising

from different emotions), as they learnt that Mrs. Bernadine had already started for her drive, and that she had not gone alone.

"Sir Julian is driving Mrs. Bernadine in the mail phaeton, my lady," the butler said to Leila in answer to her inquiries; he handed a telegram and a letter to Margot as he spoke.

Margot sent a reassuring smile into Leila's eyes.

"We have been virtuous for nothing!" she said, lightly.

Leila stood in front of the fire, looking into it mechanically.

She felt as if she had been guilty of some great wrong. Julian's attention to his mother was an old, old story. There was absolutely nothing new or strange in his thought of her this afternoon, yet to Leila it was full of a significance which her troubled heart construed only too well.

"He is hurt with me," she said to herself with a pang. She was most unhappy at the thought, and she was angry, too.

Was this how she had taught herself to minister to his happiness? She had borne with much more from Mrs. Bernadine than that which had come this morning. Why had she been so weak, so selfish? Surely she ought to have remembered him before indulging in annoyance on her own account!

More of these self-reproachful thoughts were congregating in her mind when Margot spoke.

"Leila, I am so sorry, darling, I shall have to leave you. Mother is ill; she has caught one of her bad bronchial colds; she has written and telegraphed too. The telegram is to tell me I am not to be alarmed, and that she has no need of me, but I shall go immediately."

Margot's face looked troubled.

"I always can tell how mother is by her handwriting. I am convinced she is in bed now, though she does not say so."

Leila's own troubles vanished away before this one.

"You will not wait till to-morrow, dear?" she asked; but she knew very well that Margot would not wait a moment longer than was possible.

She went upstairs with Margot, and together with the maid hurried the girl's preparations for departure.

It was more than a grief to her to part with Margot just now. She only realized how much unconscious courage and comfort Margot's presence gave her now when they were about to separate again.

The butler had looked out the train, and Margot and her belongings were all ready in the hall, when the phaeton returned with Sir Julian and his mother.

An awkward moment was saved by the little bustle of getting Margot away to the station.

Both Sir Julian and Lady Bernadine drove with their parting guest, and the sincerity of their regret at losing Margot was written plainly in their eyes.

Sir Julian would have accompanied the girl to London, but Margot vetoed this most firmly.

"Mother would never let me hear the last of it if I permitted such a thing. I am quite prepared for a good scolding as it is; but I will risk that. I cannot let her be all alone. I hope she is telling me the truth, and that it is only a little attack; but I have my doubts. In any case she is such a bad invalid and takes so little care of herself that someone in authority must be on the spot!"

Margot laughed as she said this, but her bright face had a worried look. She was grieved too to leave Leila, especially at this moment; the girl she loved had such a wistful, fragile look as they stood on the platform. Making some excuse, Margot drew Sir Julian apart.

"Julian," she said abruptly, "I want you to be very good, and write to me quietly every now and then, telling me how Leila is."

The young man looked startled and uneasy; his eyes went instantly to his wife's beautiful face. She was talking to the old station master, listening to all his well-worn stories of his ailments and troubles.

There was a touch of the pathos about Leila that he remembered in the days when he had first met her.

In an instant all the coldness and annoyance

that her manner at lunch time had aroused vanished away.

"I don't think you need be anxious," he answered Margot, not quite steadily; "she is so much stronger than she used to be."

Margot's heart leaped with gladness as she saw the expression of his eyes and heard the note in his voice.

"Yes, she is stronger, thank Heaven; but she is very, very far from being as strong as she ought to be. It is not so much physical illness I am afraid of, Julian. It is mental trouble, or—or—annoyance," Margot hesitated a little over the word. "You must never forget, Julian," she went on, dropping her voice almost to a whisper, "that Leila has to outlive memories of hardship and suffering such as few girls or women or men even have to outlive. If I could draw out her life henceforth," Margot said almost passionately, "she should live in the atmosphere in the sunshine of perpetual sympathy; but as I cannot organise her future I—"

"You must leave it to me," Julian finished.

"Have no fear, Margot. Everything a man can do to give sunshine such as you desire to our dear one's poor bruised tired heart shall be done by me. Will you not trust me? Are you not satisfied that I love her better than my life?"

"Satisfied with that—ah! yes, yes," Margot cried; she might have added more, but at this moment Leila finished her conference with the old man, and turned towards them. They stood chatting in a desultory way till the train arrived.

Margot clung to Leila's slender figure with an earnestness of affection that was almost a pain.

"Write to me very often, darling," she said, "and be happy, very happy; we shall meet soon, Leila. I would not leave you now but I am sure mother has need of me."

Julian had drawn his wife's hand through his arm as Margot was shut in the carriage. They stood watching the bright face vanish out of sight.

"It is like losing a sunbeam," Julian said, involuntarily; then, as he caught a sigh from Leila's lips he bent towards her.

"I had determined to give you a scolding little one," he said, hurriedly and tenderly; "this walk to Prescott was far too much for you."

"Oh! I did not go," Leila said, the cloud going from her face and her heart at his loving voice and words. She explained in a few shy words why it was the walk had not been taken, and Julian had a thrill of remorse as he recalled his very definite touch of temper at what he had summed up as Leila's unkindness to his mother.

"You are my little angel wife," he said in low tones as he put her into the phaeton, and tucked the rug carefully about her. "I must be very watchful of you, Leila, for angels have wings you know; and what should I do if you were to fly away from me?"

"I should not fly far," Leila laughed.

This return to their tender nonance was exquisitely sweet to her. They drove home swiftly in the dusk, talking softly together, and when they arrived there was a little rose-bloom on Leila's cheek that spoke of lightness and happiness in her heart.

She met Mrs. Bernadine with a smile, and outwardly all was peace again between them.

"This will knock your London visit on the head I fancy, mother," Julian said, as they discussed Margot's departure, and the cause.

Mrs. Bernadine's eyes shone.

"I am sorry in one sense, of course," she said; "but in another," she smiled at the young people standing together. "I don't think I am very eager to go to London; I am quite happy here!"

There was a meaning in her tone which Julian recognised as being something that it was very far from being.

He sent her a loving glance. Gradually she was being re-instated in her old place in his heart; that miserable moment of folly was being slowly but surely wiped out of all recollection. Indeed it came to Julian to-night that there was something higher and more noble in his mother's acquiescence to his marriage, in her gentle efforts to strengthen his happiness, than he had imagined possible to her nature.

"Poor mother!" he said to himself softly.

he never would be able to rid his mind of the feeling that this beautiful woman was anything more than a child—something that demanded his constant thought and care. "Poor, little mother! Thank Heaven she is happy here! My own happiness would never be complete if I were not assured of hers!"

Aloud he sent her a laughing answer. "You are quite right, mother darling!" he said. "London may be a very wonderful place, but this is an enchanted palace! we are all happy here; and we are always going to be happy! aren't we, little one?"

Leila looked up at him. "Oh! Heaven grant it! Heaven grant it!" she said; and there was that in her tone that brought back Margot's words to Julian's mind and made him instantly change the subject.

With a return to his nonsense manner he insisted on carrying his wife upstairs to dress for dinner.

They were laughing like children as they disappeared up the staircase, and Mrs. Bernadine stood by the fireside smiling as they went; but Margot, at least, would have doubted the sincerity of that smile could she have been there to see it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"We shall meet soon!" Margot had said when she had kissed farewell to Leila at the railway station; and the determination to make this "soon" very soon was strong upon her as she drove up to the door of her home. The determination melted away, however, in the weeks of anxiety that followed on her arrival in Belgrave-square.

Mrs. Sylvester was, as the girl had said, an exceedingly bad invalid; she was rash to the verge of madness; her active spirit rebelled at the thought of bed for more than a very few hours.

She set doctors and medicine at defiance, and as, as Margot wrote, in comic desperation, and yet with deepest anxiety, "altogether obstreperous!"

The slight cold developed into a very heavy illness; and more than a month had flown away before Margot could send good news to her friends at Wilton Croasbie.

"Her splendid constitution and my iron will have pulled her through," she wrote to Leila one cold March day; "but she is not by any means out of the wood. Her cough is only equalled by her obstinacy; both her nurse and doctor are frantic with her. I do assure you I believe if we did not lock up her clothes in the wardrobes she would be out of bed and prancing about in the streets. As soon as she is a wee bit stronger I am going to take her abroad. We shall go to Nice, therefore, in about a fortnight from now. Mother sends you every sort of message, and is talking of you nearly all the day. It is so good of Julian to have come up on purpose to inquire for her last week. I would let you come and join me in the nursing, but I think if you were to be here my naughty mother would be more naughty still; besides, the atmosphere of a sick room is not the place for you. Everybody has been so kind. Mr. Bernadine calls every day, and sometimes I venture out for a short walk with him in the square gardens. Cis is still away, and I keep her away; she would only fret if she were here."

"How I wish it were possible for Julian to bring you to join our little party at Nice. Mr. Bernadine is going to get a week's leave and escort us out. Mother has developed a tremendous flirtation with him. Tell Julian his nose is quite out of joint!"

"Write me again and again, darling; I seem to be talking to you when I read your letters." Leila never let a day pass without sending a word to her friend.

The constant mention of Giles Bernadine's name by Margot had grown to be a delight to her.

"They will be so happy together," she said over and over again to herself, and somehow there was always a wistful little sigh after this. Life

had gone on apparently very peacefully at Wilton Croasbie since Margot's departure.

There had been several days when Julian was absent on business, and once he had travelled up to London on purpose to make personal inquiries after Mrs. Sylvester. Those were sad grey days to Leila. A nervous dread had come over the girl of being left in her husband's home without her husband. She shrank from the very thought of Mrs. Bernadine. The mask had been dropped utterly. She knew her enemy in all her strength.

On the days of Julian's absence the two women avoided meeting if possible, and if circumstances brought them together they exchanged no word. The effort to act a lie continually to her husband was a frightful effort to Leila—it affected her health materially. She was amazed, yet full of contempt for the ease with which Mrs. Bernadine performed her share of the comedy that was being played day after day, hour after hour, in Julian's home life, while he went on his way utterly unconscious of the fact.

There had been one scene between Lady Bernadine and her husband's mother; it had occurred the day following Margot's departure. Leila had started it.

Urged by a thousand emotions, but chiefly by her deep true love, her deeper gratitude to Julian, she had determined to approach the older woman, and with all sweetness and gentleness to broach the subject of mutual comprehension and sympathy between them.

"Let us be friends—more than friends," she had said, her eyes full of tears. "I feel, I know, you do not like me. Yet I am innocent of having done you any wrong. Will you not let me feel that I am winning my way to your heart? Surely this life must be as cruel to you as to me. I feel sometimes as if I could not endure it any longer."

"You are insinuating, of course, that I should take my departure," Mrs. Bernadine had said here, with a cold smile, and eyes that were full of fury.

"Oh! yes, I know you have not said so in so many words, but you mean it all the same. Well, let me set your mind at rest. I have no intention of going—none whatever—my proper place is here. You are a usurper—you are here by fraud! I don't think to stop me now. You shall hear the truth at last. What right have you to be living here the honoured wife of my dear son, the mistress of his home! You, the child of a common thief, a man so base that to speak his name is degradation. What right have you to come between my son and me! You are his wife, you will say, and I answer that therein lies your shame. Had I been a girl in a position like yours do you think I would have ever let my selfishness do what you have done! You love Julian—love him! why the very proof of your love would have been to refuse to disgrace him by such a marriage. I have another word for your love! and now you come to me and ask me for my friendship, for my sympathy. I—the mother whom you have wronged so much. Let us understand one another once and for all. Live on here I mean to. You can possibly by working on my son's infatuation try to turn me out, but you will not succeed. I am Julian's mother. You are only his wife; he will always love me better than he loves you, so I can defy you! and I do defy you," the woman had said, her voice choked with the passion, the intensity of her anger. "You have come as a blight over my happy life, now I am going to be a blight over yours—you were not satisfied till you had worked yourself into my place. Now you must take me with all the rest, and I hope you will be satisfied with the result!"

She had swept away from Leila as she said this, and the girl had stood rooted to the ground with an anguish, a misery in her heart such as had never come to her before, not in the very hardest and the darkest hours she had experienced. She had a wildness in her agony—a desire to rush away to hide herself for ever—to escape the horror of what lay like a canker in the very heart of her happiness that had come so late—that had been so great—in this moment she would have almost welcomed death.

"Oh! Heaven help me. Heaven show me what to do!" she said to herself; she died a kind of mental death in this moment. All the horrible perplexity, the struggle that had lived with her before she had let Julian's love conquer her came back to her, only a thousand fold worse. A faintness stole over her in her anguish. she was lying back in a chair, white as death when Julian had come running up the stairs calling her name.

The door had been open, and he had caught sight of her and had rushed towards her before she could summon her courage and her strength together.

It was the picture of her husband's misery over her weakness that gave Leila the strength to carry her burden a little longer.

"If I tell him all I shall kill something in his heart that will never come again," the girl said to herself, "and how could I tell him all, how could I put the truth of his mother before him? I—I don't see my way very clearly. I don't know what will happen—the glory of my life has gone for ever—the shadow of her words and the truth in them has taken away that glory—all this is sure—but yet I cannot be the one to put the shadow over him too. He is happy. My dear, good, true love—he is so happy—his eyes are blinded—he sees nothing but what his heart wishes—he finds an added joy in her share in his happiness. Must I be the one to take this from him?"

She was very weak and ill for several days after this memorable scene. Julian had accepted her theory that she had overvalued herself, and he jumped eagerly at the suggestion to remain quiet in her room for a little while. The young man's pre-occupation and misery over his wife's delicacy was so much torture to his mother.

She wondered a little after she had quieted down what line Leila would take, and she winced a little, for she was afraid of Julian's anger. She could easily read his judgment on her if only a bare sketch of what had occurred were given to him. She soon found that Leila intended to be silent—she hated the girl doubly for this expression of dignified resignation, for this extra proof of the real true depths of the young wife's love.

Helen Bernadine was not conscious of how base and wicked her thoughts grew towards Leila. She would have seized gladly on any act or word of the girl's that would let her imagine that Leila was in truth and in deed the scheming adventurer she had called her, but none was forthcoming, nothing but proof after proof of how deeply Leila loved her husband, how proudly his pride would be sustained by her.

Then there followed those weeks in which both women played their rôle.

"She wants to drive me out," Helen Bernadine said to herself, bitterly; "let her see she is not driven out herself."

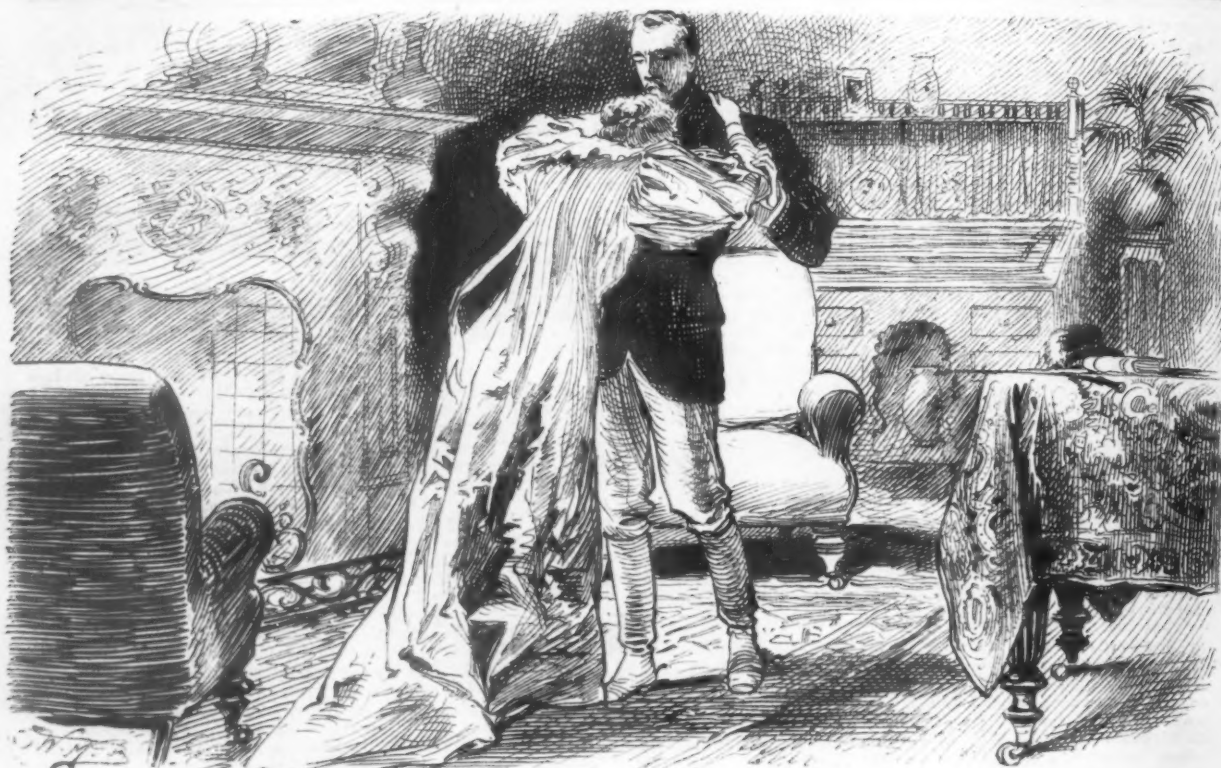
Leila found, as every other human creature finds, that things that are in anticipation too impossible can be made possible by force of circumstances. The days went, and she lived through the suffering somehow; the one gleam of joy, the one hope and happiness, was the knowledge of Julian's ignorance and content.

It was thanks to Mrs. Bernadine's skilful acting that the young man was kept thus in the dark; the elder woman played her part magnificently. Leila's delicacy was an excuse for her silence. Mrs. Bernadine acted as though she wished to relieve the girl of all exertion, she developed a great deal of brightness of manner in these days.

She was continually teasing Julian on his jealous proclivities.

"I tell Leila," she said gaily one day at luncheon, a few days after Margot and her mother had started South, "that she has no idea what an Otello-like individual you are, Julian! Do you remember what a dreadful fury you were in that summer you rather admired Blanche Foster? Oh! a harmless admiration, Leila, dear, nothing to annoy you—only if you could have seen how jealous this silly boy was because some other man received more attention than he did, you—"

"Mother, you invent very cleverly," Julian said, laughing, yet with a cloud on his face.



OH! MY BOY, MY BOY!" MRS. BERNADINE SAID IN A CHOKED VOICE, "MY POOR, UNHAPPY, BETRAYED BOY."

Leila's eyes had a look in them that seemed to tell him this sort of conversation was not agreeable to her.

"I hope, my darling," he said to Leila, "you are not going to believe all these stories about me."

"Julian, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, aspersing your mother. Are you going to try and deny that you are a jealous man?"

Mrs. Bernadine's voice and manner were merriest itself.

Julian did not laugh.

"Being your son I am afraid I cannot do this," he said, not very good humouredly.

Mrs. Bernadine changed colour.

"Now you are going to try and turn the tables on me; but it won't answer, my dear! It is a lucky thing that your little wife is such a quiet mouse. Leila will never have occasion to rouse this demon jealousy."

Leila looked into the eyes of her enemy, but she made no answer.

She had a sudden feeling now she could not have described. That the net was closing round her in some way, that Mrs. Bernadine was introducing this subject of conversation for some end of her own the girl was only too well assured.

But what end could this be?

An answer was destined to be given to Leila before another few weeks had gone.

Sir Julian was riding home leisurely enough one clear cold evening in late March. He was thinking of his wife. He was greatly troubled about her; she was so very quiet, so wan, her beauty had such a sorrowful air.

The condition of her health of course explained much; but there seemed to Julian to be much that he could not quite explain.

Had her father been communicating with her? he asked himself. It was possible, and yet he had such infinite trust in Leila that he could not believe she would allow this and not tell him. He half determined to question her.

"Such a fox-like scoundrel issued to try and creep in somewhere," he said to himself. He detested having to give Eustace Vane any place in his thoughts at all; still he was an evil that would always have to be counted with so long as he was alive.

Julian sighed as his thoughts dwelt on Leila. She was more precious to him every day that he lived. He found it impossible to set down in actual words what this sweet, gentle girl was to him. She soothed him, she ministered to him, and he confessed to himself that he wanted soothing lately.

He hardly knew where it had begun or developed, but something about his mother had jarred on him very much of late. She was always so merry, so excited as it were. He wondered if her companionship was good for Leila.

In a dim, distant sort of way he felt that life alone with Leila would be very, very sweet for a time.

But this was something that stirred in his heart unconfessed, and his son's affection would never let it escape unless it was forced to do so.

"I feel half inclined to do as the Sylvester's suggested, and carry Leila off to the South. She would not feel the journey, perhaps, if we did it gently!" he said to himself as he reached home.

His pulses quickened at the thought.

He dismounted in the stable yard. He had been out nearly all day. The house was in dusk when he entered.

"Where is her ladyship?" he asked of the butler who came hurrying at the sound of his step.

It was Mrs. Bernadine who answered him.

"Julian," her voice said, sounding mysterious and alarming from the door of the study. "Come here, I want you."

Julian was conscious of some weighty sensation.

"What is it, mother?" he asked, irritably, "why are you all in the dark, and where is Leila?"

Mrs. Bernadine closed the door behind him as he entered. The firelight was the only light in

the room, it shone on her face and showed it to be white and very agitated.

"Leila has gone!" she said in low, far tones; then she flung herself with a gesture of abandon into Sir Julian's arms, and she broke into a fit of weeping tears.

"Oh! my boy, my boy!" she said in a choked voice, "my poor, unhappy, betrayed boy, how shall I help you to bear this awful thing!"

(To be continued.)

ST. PETERSBURG was built by Peter the Great on a swamp. The entire soil is made ground, and the people find it impossible to live there for any length of time without making prolonged absences for the purpose of recovering their health. The suggested removal of the Court permanently to Moscow or Kieff is regarded with something like dismay in St. Petersburg, where fortunes have been lavished in building huge palaces, which would be practically useless should the Court be removed to the banks of the Dnieper. It also affects, to a smaller extent, foreign Governments, who have built splendid abodes for their embassies.

It frequently happens that ropes thrown out from boats are lost, as they sink at once if the end on board slips from the sailor's hands. To prevent this, ropes are now made of cotton over a centre of small pieces of cork, which cannot sink. The many advantages offered by this improvement are obvious. For life-saving apparatus the adoption of such rope will be especially useful. As it will float under all circumstances, such a rope will show a lost anchor or drag-net; or, if rolled up, may even be used for a lifebuoy. If the cork centrepieces are even and well fitted, they will not interfere in the least either with the suppleness or the strength of the rope. A test has shown it to stand even a greater strain than an ordinary rope of the same thickness.



YOLANDE PUT OUT HER ARMS IN A BLIND, GROPING KIND OF WAY.

DR. DURHAM'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XXX.

"My life is full of weary days,
But good things have not kept aloof,
Nor wandered into other ways:
I have not lack'd thy mild reproof,
Nor golden largess of thy praise."

"And now shake hands across the brink
Of that deep grave to which I go;
Shake hands once more; I cannot sink
So far—far down, but I shall know,
Thy voice, and answer from below."

AND now a year had flown since the old Earl of Beaumanoir died and was laid in the family vault by the side of his forefathers in theirypress-shadowed corner of the Foxdale churchyard.

Yes, another year was gone; and now it was late winter or, rather, early spring time again.

The evening, however, was bleak and blustering, proclaiming the near advent of wild March days. Monster clouds, murky and threatening, travelled heavily athwart the sky as if driven onward by some invisible scourge.

Big rain-drops splashed down now and then when the cold rough wind was resting for a while.

A closed carriage at a brisk rate was driving in the gloaming along the Slingford-road; and as the clocks at Foxdale Castle clanged out the hour of six, the horses turned in at the huge iron shield-crowned gates of the lodge, which were standing wide open hospitably, on this gusty February evening, as if in expectation of their arrival.

Climbing the steep avenue, the animals slackened their pace; and then the occupants of the carriage—there were but two—spoke.

"Home again at last, my darling!" said Lyulph, the new Earl of Beaumanoir.

And Countess Margery laid her head upon her husband's breast and whispered,—

"Yes, my Lyulph; the dearest home in all the world to me."

This was the home-coming of Lord and Lady Beaumanoir after their travels abroad, upon which they had set out about two months subsequent to the old Earl's death, leaving Lady Anne Guest in their absence sole mistress at Foxdale Castle.

With regard to what had been happening in Foxdale, Revelstoke, and Slingford, during their absence from the neighbourhood, the young couple knew absolutely nothing.

For as it was settled before starting that their peregrinations should be wide and uncertain, they had not thought it worth while to lose time in waiting about for chance home-news.

At the commencement of their tour, it was true, Lady Anne had written once or twice; Dr. Durham himself the same; and these epistles had sometimes followed the young Earl and his wife from place to place, and ultimately found them out.

Since then, however, they had managed to exist very well without letters, and consequently had not been obliged to write any.

Of course they had sent word home as to the precise date of their returning to Foxdale; and, moreover, had begged Lady Anne so to arrange matters in the neighbourhood that there should be no unnecessary demonstration, on the part of the tenants and villagers, attending the event.

The late Earl had been dead and in his grave so short a while at present, it was more seemly—the young Countess and her husband judged—that their home-coming to the Castle should be as unostentatious as possible.

Indeed they had purposely timed the end of their journey for the closing-in of the day.

From London to Bristol they had travelled by rail. At Bristol they had hired post-horses. And there, in that city, much to their astonishment, the hotel-keeper had informed them that soon the chief railroad was to be extended right into Slingford!

Surely Foxdale and Revelstoke would wake up

next, said Countess Margery; and young Lord Beaumanoir laughed at the bare idea!

When the many lighted windows of the dear old Castle, Margery's beautiful home, came into sight, shining and all aglow through the windy darkness, her heart fluttered in a joyous tumult, her whole soul was filled with impatience.

How she had used to long and sigh, she remembered now in the old days gone by, to behold the wonderful foreign sights and cities which the folk who had seen them all returned home to chatter about!

How she used to wonder if her turn would ever come; if her young eyes would ever look upon the gorgeous and historic buildings she had heard of so often, the splendid dim cathedrals, the dusky world-famed paintings, the noble priceless statuary—the snow-crowned and vine-clad mountains, the German forests, the heaven-blue lakes under an Italian sky!

But lately Margery, Countess of Beaumanoir had gazed upon all these things—had turned from them, wearied of them, thinking of Foxdale; for among their number and infinite variety she had met with nothing to equal the beauty, nothing to compare worthily with the thorough English loveliness, of her own noble old home.

Still, the foreign spot which had most enchained her fancy was the glorious quaint old town on the banks of the Neckar—Heidelberg—where Lyulph had passed so many years of his life, and where both his mother and his friend Karl von Rosenberg had died and lay buried.

More than once had they gone, she and Lyulph in the sweet purple twilight, to visit those friendless lonely graves; to scatter their fresh and lovely living flowers upon the cold slabs of marble and cross which marked them upon the warm hillside.

"Home, my darling—yes, really home at last, thank Heaven!" young Lord Beaumanoir cried, with a heart of his own as light and joyous as Margery's, as the hired carriage stopped before the great open door, just where a flood of warmth

and brightness streamed forth upon the outside windy gloom.

Even to-day Margery clearly remembers seeing her father and Lady Anne standing there together, framed in the arch of the fine old doorway.

But how she actually reached them both a moment afterwards she does not in the least recollect—unless it was that she leaped direct from the carriage-step clean into their arms as they stood there!

Ah, that was a happy, happy evening—at any rate, the earlier portion of it, the first hour of their reunion, was undimmed by a single cloud.

After dinner, they all four withdrew to the garden-parlour—the warm, cosy little apartment, far removed from the stately drawing-rooms, which the late Lord Beaumanoir had loved and died in.

Lady Anne, his sister, had likewise taken a fancy to this pretty garden-room, as indeed Margery herself had done before she went away with Lyulph.

But after that memorable night of their return from abroad, young Lady Beaumanoir grew to dislike the garden-parlour, shunned it in a sort of nervous, unquerable horror; for it seemed to Margery, albeit she had never been superstitious, that the room was a fatal room, and haunted by the shadow of death.

"It is very, very good of you, daddy," said she gratefully, as they sat round the fire before the tea came in—Margery herself in the midst of that "well-beloved few"—"to be here to meet and welcome us to-night. To tell the truth, Lyulph and I half expected it, but we were not at all sure. Of course, we knew that we should find on the spot our dear Aunt Anne Guest," added young Lady Beaumanoir affectionately.

Now at this perfectly natural and innocent assertion Lady Anne herself smiled oddly and glanced at Margery's father.

Whereupon Dr. Durham smiled oddly in return and glanced at Lady Anne.

Then Margery in some perplexity shrugged her shoulders slightly—perhaps, like Mrs. Kildare, she had learned the trick in France—and glanced questioningly at the face of her husband.

He, however, in response to the mute interrogation, shook his head with a mystified air as he laughed back light-heartedly at his wife.

"Well," exclaimed Countess Margery then, "I wish very much that you would enlighten us, my dear father! All dinner-time you were chuckling to yourself about something, I could very plainly see; and really, now that I come to think of it, Aunt Anne Guest," said young Lady Beaumanoir severely—a loving mock severity—"has been almost as bad herself! There is a joke of some kind hidden away somewhere, I am now convinced of it. Come, what is it, sir! Tell us this moment!"

Lady Anne was already looking very guilty. A conscious blush, or something curiously like it, tinged her sweet face; her delicate lips were twitching.

"Why, then, will you persist, Margery, in calling your relative 'Lady Anne Guest,'" said Dr. Durham, gravely, yet with twinkling eyes, possessing himself, as he spoke, of Lady Anne's slim white hand, wherein many rings were all flashing and scintillating together—"when the lady is no longer 'Lady Anne Guest'!"

"My dear daddy, what in the world do you mean?" exclaimed Countess Margery, amazed at so extraordinary a statement.

But Lord Beaumanoir, who had already divined the happy secret, had risen from his seat to kiss his father's gentle sister on her pure pale brow.

"We were married the other day," explained Dr. Durham then, "and have taken the liberty of installing ourselves for the present"—his eyes twinkling again in their old bright roguish way—"at Little Slingford Court.

"Mr. Finch—you recollect Finch, Margery, who used to come over from Slingford to assist me in the surgery! Well, Finch has bought up the practice, and with it, I trust and believe, upon my hearty recommendation of him to them all, the entire confidence and goodwill of my patients

as well. He is now living with his wife and children at the old house in Foxdale.

"Aunt Susan, you see, as Mrs. Price, had taken herself off to live at the Vicarage. You, Margery, had forsaken me for some one else. And I was left alone, in loneliness complete—a village Robinson Crusoe, as you might almost say—until Lady Anne there took compassion on me, like the angel of goodness that she is, and transformed me into the happiest man upon the face of the whole earth!"

How could Margery tell her father and his wife that she wished them endless joy, when smiles and tears together choked down and hindered all that she tried to say as fast as it rose to her lips!

So his chivalrous love of years was crowned at last—John Durham's staunch devotion to the dead Earl had won in the end its just reward!

They had sent away the urn and the cups; the clocks throughout the Castle had struck the half-hour after nine.

They had been talking with deep interest and animation of many things, touching alike the past, the present, and the future, and it seemed indeed as if they would never grow weary of their talk and crowding reminiscences.

So much, it appeared, had been happening in one direction and another, during the ten months' absence of Lord and Lady Beaumanoir, it was no wonder that their fireside conversation was unflagging and that the hours sped by unheeded!

"And the Kildares!" asked the young Earl, carelessly, by-and-by—"are they living at the Grange House again? They were away, I remember, when we left Foxdale."

Both the doctor and Lady Anne Durham looked grave at this question from Lyulph.

A momentary silence fell on the pleasant little garden-room that opened to the broad terrace walk.

Out of doors the wind was bellowing through the bleak woods and valleys, shrieking, moaning, sobbing in the leafless tree-tops, and dashing down the occasional raindrops with a sharp pattering hail-like sound against the long French window of the garden-parlour.

As it so chanced, the shutters were not closed, nor were the heavy crimson curtains even drawn.

The long window was exactly behind them as they sat round the fire, and they had completely forgotten that it remained uncovered.

And so those large glinting panes, set in their solid old-fashioned oak framework, were bared to the tempestuous night.

"Do you, then, not know, my boy—have we not yet told you," Dr. Durham said at last, "that there is now no hope left in this world for Yolande Kildare! She—she is dying."

Margery's heart seemed to cease beating all at once.

The awful tidings had whitened her cheek.

In vivid fancy, Yolande Kildare took shape once more before the eyes of young Lady Beaumanoir as she—Margery—had last seen her only a year ago, crouching in the wintry twilight against the meadow stile by which they had parted in bitter enmity, with her huge hounds whimpering around her, themselves troubled at their mistress's grief.

And in fancy, too, Margery heard again distinctly the tones of Yolande's despairing voice, plaintively following her hurrying footsteps, borne upon the chill evening wind.

"Oh, daddy," she exclaimed involuntarily, in shocked, low accents, "can it be really true!"

And somehow Margery shrank just then from encountering Lyulph's eyes; though she might have known, oh, she might have known so well, that there could be neither reason nor justification for so pitiful a cowardice on her part!

"She and her mother," Dr. Durham proceeded to tell them, "returned from the South of France quite six months ago now; and as soon as ever I was summoned to the Grange House to attend Yolande, I saw in a moment, poor soul, that her case was hopeless.

"Coming home, they told me, she had been seen and prescribed for by an eminent Paris physician; but his opinion of her malady, it

seemed, was precisely the same as my own—the consumption was of too rapid a nature to admit of either hope or cure.

"Since then she has been dying day by day, hour by hour, as one might say, suffering intensely at times, and at others not at all.

"Yesterday, however, Finch said she was sinking fast—she could not possibly last much longer.

"But to-day, when I called with inquiries at the Grange House, they told me that there was no perceptible change in her condition of the past week.

"I never thought Yolande so delicate myself," said Dr. Durham thoughtfully—"at all events, not consumptive."

"Oh, poor Yolande!" said Margery, under her breath, staring straight into the depths of the fire through a mist of fast-gathering tears.

And still she could not bring herself to look at her husband; albeit his eyes, she felt, were persistently and reprovingly seeking her own.

Naturally Lord Beaumanoir was every whit as greatly pained and shocked as was Margery herself, at this cruel news of Yolande; notwithstanding a loving desire to rebuke her weak distrust of him was just then uppermost in Lyulph's heart, and Margery knew it.

All at once a shriek from Lady Anne startled them all greatly.

She had grasped the arm of Dr. Durham with one nervous hand; and with the other, all trembling, she was pointing to the long uncovered window.

"Look, look!" Lady Anne exclaimed, excitedly; "it is—it is Yolande—Yolande Kildare—or her wraith! Oh, look!"

Dismayed, they rose hurriedly from their seats by the fireside, their scared, incredulous eyes following the direction of Lady Anne Durham's quivering, outstretched hand.

There in the wind and the rain stood the frail, cloaked form of a woman—the hood fallen away from her bare head, her fair hair all drenched and wildly ruffled.

Her white face was pressed close against the rain-splashed panes; her fixed wild gaze was taking in hungrily the interior of the garden-parlour.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Oh, it is no ghost—no wraith—it is Yolande herself!" cried young Lady Beaumanoir; and flew to the window straightway, without more ado.

With hands quivering in every nerve, she unlocked the long glass doors, and flung them wide apart that Yolande might enter.

Then, as Margery made haste to shut out the rough wet wind, and the drenching, driving rain-drops, locking the doors again and now drawing the heavy curtains over them to exclude the draught as well, Yolande put out her arms in a blind, groping kind of way, and, with a gasping cry, fell down, spent and lifeless, at Lord Beaumanoir's feet, before his quick strong hold could either catch or prevent her.

"Raise her, Lyulph; lift her; carry her upstairs—you are younger and stronger than I," Dr. Durham said, prompt and collected, while Lady Anne herself ran for brandy and other likely restoratives, and to despatch a messenger to the Grange House. "How in the name of all that is extraordinary, did she manage to get out on such a night as this. And in this state, too! What on earth were her people thinking about to let her escape them, I should like to know!"

Tenderly, as if she were his sister, Lord Beaumanoir had lifted Yolande into his arms.

Her poor wet head was pillowed upon his breast.

Her own wasted arms, with an effort that was almost beyond her strength, she had clasped about his neck.

Could this indeed be lovely Yolande Kildare, Margery was asking herself, with a feeling akin to awe—this fragile, changed, emaciated, white-faced woman, with the wild sunk eyes and laboured breath!

Truly Love, whom she had mocked so often in her time, had gained for himself at last a terrible

revenge in the penalty of this master-passion of her brief perverted life!

"To my room, Lyulph," Margery said, quickly, taking up a candlestick and herself leading the way, thinking only of atonement and forgiveness in this tragic hour of supreme suffering.

And Dr. Durham followed Lord Beaumanoir and the frail burthen he carried.

"I wanted to see you once more, my love—my love!" moaned Yolande, as they ascended, slowly and carefully the wide oak stairs, the fantastic shadows of the great dim hall fitting on ahead of them in demon shapes. "I wanted to see you just once again before I died!"

"Lyulph—Lyulph," she panted, "by mere chance I heard that you were coming home to-night, and—and I determined that I would seek you and find you—somehow. I feigned sleep—I outwitted them—I got away"

"Yes, though dying, I got away For love—for love, you know, Lyulph—for love is strong as death—the Bible says so—and—and now I am content, beloved! Yes, now!"

"Though dying—I felt it every inch of the way—I fought with the wind and the rain, the sweet thought of beholding you once more, once more on earth, bringing back to me a strength and vitality I have not known for months."

"But even in my wildest moments, I—I never thought to feel again your dear arms around me—no that, I believed, could never be again for me!"

"I only—I only meant to look upon your face, if possible, myself unseen, unsuspected, and then and then to die satisfied content"

"But this, Lyulph, is sweet indeed exceeding sweet beyond all earthly hope or expectation beyond all"

"Hush—oh, hush, Yolande!" he said, speaking as calmly as he could. "You must not talk. It is—it is better, wiser, to remain quiet. Is it not so, Dr. Durham?"

Margery could tell that her poor boy's heart was touched poignantly, to mark how terribly changed was this girl—that tears, in spite of him, were falling upon the wan wasted upturned face upon his breast and among the wet tresses of golden hair that streamed so dankly about his shoulder.

He had loved her so dearly once! Ah, so dearly!

And her sins were forgotten now!

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Durham cheerily, "lie still, my good girl, and we will see what we can do for you. We will have you better again presently, Yolande, if you will only do what we know is best and right for you."

But Yolande did not reply.

And when they came to loosen gently her clinging arms from Lyulph's neck, to place her upon the soft cushions of Margery's warm dressing-room sofa, they found that restoratives were of no avail—for she was dead!

"Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low,
And the flick'ring shadows softly come and go,
Though the heart be weary, sad the day and long,
Still to us at twilight comes love's old song,
"Come Love's old sweet song."

The years since that ever-to-be-remembered night, when Yolande Kildare died in Lord Beaumanoir's arms, have rolled steadily onward with their freight of sorrow and joy.

They have streaked with silver threads the once soft dark hair of Countess Margery, and the wavy light-chestnut locks of her lord and master too.

There is, alas! no arresting the work of old Time, rebel or murmur as we may.

We feel that his pitiless hand is putting the crows' feet to our eyes, and robbing our faces of their youthful bloom; that he is piling the flesh upon our unwilling bones, or perchance withering skeleton-like the little that is theirs.

Still we are powerless to stay for an instant his relentless handiwork, and so with a sigh accept from him our burthen of age, since we know that we cannot reject it!

Dr. Durham, a very old man, is yet alive. And so likewise is a certain slender, sweet-faced,

snow-white haired old lady whom Countess Margery in tender fun sometimes calls "Lady Anne Guest."

Together they, the doctor and Lady Anne Durham, dwell at Little Slingford Court; and long, prays Margery—though the loving hope, she knows, is a vain one—may they continue to do so!

The Grange House, on the other side of the hills, has been leased for many a year past now to a wealthy Slingford brewer.

For after the death of Yolande Mrs. Kildare went away, for good and all, from Foxdale; and the Beaumanoirs saw her no more.

Rumour indeed said afterwards that she had met and had married a snuffy and hirsute old Indian nabob, yellow as a guinea and rolling in rupees, whom she eventually led such a terrible dance that she literally worried him out of his life.

"Ah, Margery," remarked homely Aunt Susan—who, Countess Margery well recollects, was the first person in the place to bring her the gossip about Mrs. Kildare—"Ah, Margery, 'Gold has more worshippers than Heaven.' I have told you so many a time, my dear; but, all the same, it is as true now as when it was first said."

Although the jovial and worldly little vicar of Foxdale, as Margery believes, never found reason to regret in any wise his choice of a wife in her Aunt Susan Patchett, busy-bodies, nevertheless, certainly did whisper it that he grew a trifle weary as the years went on of her trite and everlasting "proverbial philosophy."

Margery herself, who was with Aunt Susan, good soul, in the hour when her eyes were closed in "the sweet sleep," knows that she went fearlessly to her last account with a proverb of Solomon's upon her lips.

Sometimes, when Lady Beaumanoir is alone, she calls on the Finch family at the dear old house in Foxdale, and requests of them permission to stroll round the garden and the orchard.

Margery prefers to go by herself always, and the good people of the house are pleased to humour her in the fancy.

Lady Beaumanoir can recall the "dear dead past" far better and more completely in solitude, a-down the alleys of that fair old garden!

Sir George and Lady Stoke of Revelstoke—he chose a grand-daughter of the house of Verrinder in the course of time—are great friends of the Beaumanoirs.

Indeed Margery's boys and girls are almost as often to be found at Revelstoke Hall as are the unruly Stoke youngsters at Foxdale Castle.

Countess Margery's head-nurse Molly—she that was their housemaid at the old home in Lady Beaumanoir's girlhood time—has pretty stiff work of it sometimes in flying from one house to the other.

If the young ones under her charge manage to give her the slip, which unhappily for nurse Molly is not a rare occurrence, she is always tolerably certain where they may be recaptured again—particularly if the elder ones be missing as well.

When Margery's first-born came she gave him proudly his father's name—so that he, too, now Viscount Edenbridge, will be, should Heaven spare him, some day Lyulph Lord Beaumanoir.

But when the second arrived they called him after Karl von Rosenberg.

There are also at Foxdale Castle a sweet little toddling Anne, a small gentle Raoul, and a wee pink tiny Margery—

But perhaps it is better that Countess Margery should hint no more concerning her treasures.

For when the tongue of a doting mother is once set running upon the subject of her precious children she knows not when or how to leave off, proving herself invariably an insufferable bore.

It has been stated elsewhere in this veracious record that Margery Countess of Beaumanoir was never much of a musician.

She was never brilliant in accomplishments, like Yolande Kildare.

Nevertheless, Lyulph, who loves music, a taste inherited from his mother, once the long-suffering Griselda Lyane, insists on Margery's performing

sometimes, when he and she are perchance alone, sitting together in the falling twilight.

And it is solely to please her lord that Margery does her humble best.

This is the song that she oftentimes sings:

"John Anderson, my Jo, John,
When we were first acquaint,
Your locks were like the raven's,
Your bonnie brow was bent;
But now your brow is bald, John,
Your locks are like the snow;
My blessings on your frosty pox,
John Anderson, my Jo."

"John Anderson, my Jo, John,
We clamb the hill together,
And mony a canty day, John,
We've had with ane another.
Now we maun totter down, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep together at the foot,
John Anderson, my Jo."

But if he, the hero, the only love of her life, should go first, and leave her solitary here on earth, she knows that he will watch impatiently, wishfully, until she appear at his side again.

And if she should be taken first, and he be left behind, she will lean, like the Blessed Damsel, far over the golden parapet of heaven, amid the blooming and deathless roses and the mystic light of the stars—will wait and watch there, ever faithful, until he come.

[THE END.]

HELEN'S DILEMMA.

—10:—

CHAPTER XXXI.—(continued.)

"I read an account of your exploits in the papers," said Helen, abruptly. It was not necessary to add that she nearly knew it off by heart—that the paragraph had been carefully cut out, and reposed among the most sacred treasures in her desk at home. "I must congratulate you on your great courage, and your marvellous escape."

"Oh!" colouring with pleasure; "as to the courage, that was nothing. Any other fellow would have done the same."

"And why did they not?" interrupted Helen.

"By all accounts there were thousands in the street. But you were the only one of them all who was ready to peril your life."

"Ah, well, I daresay lots of them had wives and families; and I was pretty near the door. You must not think too much of what I did. Surely no one would stand by and see a helpless boy burned in his bed without trying to lend a hand!"

"You were scorched and burnt, were you not?"

"Oh, nothing to speak of—just a little singe on the arm I got going upstairs."

"How did you get upstairs? Were they not on fire?"

"Yes, the banisters and some of the carpeting was in a blaze; but I need not tell you that I did not loiter en route; they fell in about two minutes after. It was an old house, and burnt like brown paper. I would not have believed that fire could spread in such a way if I had not seen it. It devoured everything before it—it was like a furnace."

"It must have been awful; what danger you were in. I cannot bear to think of it," said Helen, impetuously.

"Can you not?" looking at her keenly. "I must say, Miss Brown, that it is awfully good of you to take such an interest in a perfect stranger."

Helen coloured to the very eyes, and a hasty answer was on the tip of her tongue; but ere it had found words he paused in the pathway, and said,—

"Forgive me. I had no right to say that. I would have gone into the fire ten times to hear what you said just now; it makes me hope that, perhaps, in spite of all, you will forgive me yet!"

"Why should you set such store by my forgiveness?" said Helen, with trembling lips and

her eyes on the ground. "Why should you talk such nonsense when you know you have never even thought it worth while to ask me to let bygones be bygones, nor show any wish to renew our—our—our—acquaintance?"

"Call it that, if you will; it will do as well as anything else," he answered; "but the reason I have not been to see you, nor written to you, nor spoken is simply that I feared that I had offended past all forgiveness—that the very sight of me must have brought hateful recollections to your mind; that you would think me a mean-spirited craven, who deserted and disowned and disbelieved you in your days of trouble, and would gladly come and be friends once you had come out into the sun of prosperity. You may forgive me, but it is more than I dare to hope; but one thing is positively certain, I shall never forgive myself. Helen, I am going abroad to-morrow; I must be away for months. You don't know how different I should feel going away if—"

"Helen and Rupert!" cried a voice, in a high key of amusement; and, in another second, Miss Blanche Despard appeared from a side-walk standing before them, disgusted incredulity written in plain letters over every feature of her pale, little, spiteful face.

"Helen, I have been looking for you everywhere. Lady Frances wants you at once to sing; and, Rupert, mother wishes to speak to you particularly. She is sitting on one of the green seats at the end of this walk. It was she who told me where to find you. Come along, Helen, they are waiting for you."

So saying Miss Despard promptly carried off her cousin, and left Sir Rupert standing in the middle of the path alone, cursing his unlucky fate, and muttering many anathemas under his dark moustache.

Needless to say that his aunt's anxiety for an interview was merely a *ruse* to detach him from his too dangerous companion.

After a few commonplaces had been exchanged between him and his elderly relative he shook himself, so to speak, free, and made his way resolutely into the house, and edged, and steered, and manoeuvred a passage into the music-room, but everybody, like himself, seemed eager "to hear Miss Brown sing."

There was no debarring her from the piano, no hiding her light under a bushel now. No; those clear, full, sweet notes rang out in the ears of the most fashionable audience in London. Her light no longer was hidden.

She sang "My dearest heart," and there was a thrill of subdued emotion in her notes that reached the heart of the most careless listener.

In such a case it can be readily imagined how it found an echo in the heart of Sir Rupert, who, with his arms folded across his breast, leant against a wall with his eyes fastened on the face of the fair performer.

As the last bars of the song died away, and she stooped forward to take up her gloves, their eyes met for one single instant—not in an inadvertent little "look across the crowd"—met and exchanged a glance—a glance that was far more to Helen than the loud thunder of applause which, after a second's hushed silence, followed the conclusion of her song.

On her way to the carriage Sir Rupert accosted her once more.

It was only for a hasty, hurried moment; for Mrs. Despard was, as it were, driving her niece and daughter before her, anxious to be among the first departures.

"You are staying in Cadogan-crescent," he said, "are you not?"

"Yes, just for two or three days, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Towers have gone down to the country to see some old friends."

"Then"—lowering his voice—"may I write to you?"—(low as he spoke his whisper was audible to Blanche's sharp ears)—"and if I do, will you send me one line, even one word, to speed me on my journey with a lighter heart?"

"Here is the carriage. Come, girls," said Mrs. Despard, impatiently; "I suppose we shall hardly see you again, Rupert! Get in, Blanche—get in, Helen," impatiently.

There was no time for further conversation—

nor for any other answer than Helen implied by her giving Sir Rupert her hand—her hand and a smile.

In another second the fretting boys had plunged away from the porch, and the lovers were parted.

Ah! they little guessed for how long.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALL the way home Helen was thinking of her letter. What would be the burden of it? What would he say?

Her meeting with her *ex-dévant* lover that afternoon had aroused all her latent feelings—her love for him had stepped to the front, and thrust pride, indignation, and jealousy entirely out of sight.

What was it there was about him so different to other men?

Why did her heart beat tumultuously at the sound of his voice, her colour come and go beneath his gaze?

He was sorry, very sorry, that he had misjudged her. Yes, she could see it in his face. He loved her as well as ever, she was certain.

He would come back to her from South America—come back to her, and all would be well with them yet!

Yes, but she never reckoned on her evil genius who was sitting opposite to her on the back seat of the carriage, her hands tightly-locked in her lap, her eyes closed in feigned fatigue, her face set and rigid—her evil genius, who was busily spinning plan after plan of dire purport in the recesses of her calculating, cruel mind.

Helen was anxious to be alone with her thoughts.

It was dreadfully up-hill work talking to her aunt and sustaining a fair share of conversation when her mind was full of a totally different subject to the various smart dresses which had been displayed on Lady Frances's lawn.

It was half-past seven when they reached home, and Helen hastened up to her own room, removed her bonnet and gloves, and sat down in the window to look her new-found happiness straight in the face.

The letter would come by the early post next morning. Yes, of that she was confident. The post came round at half-past seven.

In twelve hours more she would hold it in her hands; but how was she to send the answer—for answer it must have!

Dinner was postponed till half-past eight, and for a whole hour Helen sat in the twilight, dreaming day-dreams, and building many fair castles in the air.

Castles in the air indeed! Already her cousin (the wicked fairy) had reduced her fair building to the dust.

Blanche knew Rupert's ways from long experience. She knew that if he wrote he would send his missive by hand; so all dinner-time her ears were strained, her mind on the *qui vive* to hear the hall-door bell, dreading it unspeakably—dreading to see the fatal letter appearing on a salver; but it did not come.

The meal was safely tided over, and Helen little knew with the conclusion of the repast her hopes were over too.

It had been a mere question of moments—a matter of ten minutes' delay; and yet that little ten minutes was the cause of a heavy heart, and of many bitter, unavailing tears.

Sir Rupert had hurried back to town, intending to write and despatch his letter at once; but on the way he was accosted by a friend who kept him for fully ten minutes to listen to a grievance—a fatal delay.

Ten minutes after the ladies had left the dining-room there came a smart pull at the bell, and Blanche, who had been lingering on the stairs, received a note in a square grey envelope, addressed in a well-known hand-writing to Miss Brown; "the messenger was to wait for an answer," said the footman, as he placed it in Miss Despard's eager grasp.

"Very well; later I will give it to Miss Brown,

and will let you know if there is any reply," she returned, ascending the stairs, and going into the drawing-room for appearances' sake.

She glanced with a half-guilty look at Helen, whose lovely head was bent low over some knitting, near a shady reading lamp. How pretty she looked, even Blanche grudgingly confessed to herself, and how little she knew what Blanche had in her pocket. After allowing a reasonable delay of about twenty minutes Miss Despard again descended to the hall and desired the footman to tell Sir Rupert's messenger "that Miss Brown had received the note, but that there was no answer."

Poor Helen could hardly sleep all night for thinking of the happiness that was to come to her the next morning; and early—as early as the first milk-cart—she rose, and wrapping herself in her dressing gown, sat down at her window to watch for the post. How long it appeared—how very, very long—before his well-known blue and red uniform came into view, and his loud rap-rap was heard across the street. "One door, two doors, now the corner house," said Helen to herself with feverish excitement; "now he is coming here." Yes, he was coming across the road sorting a packet in his hand.

"Rap-rap!" How her heart jumped! Her letter had come of course, but how was she to get it? She could not, would not, wait a whole hour till breakfast-time; she would ring for Valérie, her maid. Yes, happy thought, hurrying to the bell.

Valérie was amazed to see her young mistress up and about so early—standing in the middle of the room with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, and all eagerness for the morning letters. Valérie descended sedately, and sedately returned, bearing in her hand two epistles. One glance was enough.

Neither of them was the letter, and Helen's hopes fell to zero. She felt almost ready to burst into tears, as she turned over, with shaking fingers, a receipt from a bookseller; and the programme of a concert for charitable purposes.

She felt as if life was very hard to bear this sunny July morning; but "hope springs eternal in the human breast." And by the time she had swallowed a cup of tea, which Valérie had procured as a kind of reward for her mistress's early rising, she had begun to turn her thoughts, with fond expectation, to the eleven o'clock post. And stimulated by hope—by the certain conviction that it *must* come then—she struggled to dress, and to take an interest in life once more.

Deluded girl! your letter is lying in the under-drawer of Blanche's dressing-case, at this identical moment; and Blanche, who is not troubled with such a thing as a conscience, is reposing comfortably among her pillows—sleeping the sleep of the just.

It is hardly necessary to tell of Helen's disappointment as the eleven o'clock post went by, and never even knocked at No. 7, Cadogan-crescent. Yet hope is hard to quench; and, framing one excuse after another, she stayed indoors all day—hoping against hope—believing that her promised letter had been delayed in some unaccountable manner—but that, though late, it would arrive yet.

Days followed one another. What long, blank, empty days, and still no letter. The *Chimborazo*, in which Sir Rupert had sailed, had now been a fortnight at sea, so it was fully time for Helen to put away her withered, dead hopes, and to bury them decently.

Blanche had seen the struggle—the anguish in her cousin's mind—had seen, with inward triumph, her spasmodic attempts at cheerfulness—her eager eyes, when letters were brought in—her face of white, bitter disappointment. Yes, so far so good!

Rupert was out of the way for the next six months, and by the time he came back Helen would be married. Yes, married to Tavy Lesborough. She could never make a stand against her aunt, Lady Lesborough, and Mrs. Towers—not to mention Tavy himself.

"You and Rupert seemed to have made it up again, that day at Lady Frances's," she observed to Helen, a day or two after her cousin's departure. "I saw him chatting away with you

quite amiably, but that was because his young lady was not there!"

"I don't believe he has any special young lady, as you call it!" replied Helen, boldly.

"Oh! but he *has*. If he denied it, you must not mind him; it's a little way that men have! I have known a man who declared that he hardly knew a girl—and actually married her within the week. Men hate people to know that they are engaged; they think that it spoils their fun!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIR RUPERT had awaited an answer to his letter with no little anxiety. He had paced his room from end to end whilst his Mercury was away.

His watch lay before him on the table, and he consulted it eagerly every five minutes. Strange to say, his messenger was not more than an hour late, in his opinion, when he heard his welcome ring.

We, who were behind the scenes, know very well that the said retainer had done his errand with all reasonable speed.

"But where is the letter?" said his master, impatiently, gazing incredulously at his empty hand.

"There was no answer, Sir Rupert," replied the groom, respectfully. "Miss Despard came down into the hall, and said so herself."

"Miss Despard—how? You did not send the note up to her?" inquired his master, quickly.

"Oh, no, sir; but she took it up herself, and she brought down the message, and said as how Miss Brown said there was no answer."

Griggs was Sir Rupert's factotum. He accompanied his master everywhere, from Constantinople to Cargew, and he knew all about his master's flirtation with the governess.

Oh, yes; he had his eyes in his head, he would have told you; and how the governess, who was certainly a very good-looking young woman, turned out to be an heiress with thousands and thousands of pounds! It was like a fairy tale; but Mrs. Despard's maid declared that it was gospel truth.

Well, he, Griggs, had no objection to the match. He was getting pretty sick of wandering about, and he thought it quite time that his master was settled.

He was the more confirmed in this idea by the fact of there being a very tidy little girl—a gamekeeper's daughter at Cargew—who would make no opposition if he asked her to be Mrs. Griggs. So, you see, that he had a kind of personal interest in getting his master married.

He had felt instinctively that there was something in the wind by the way Sir Rupert had given him the note, and told him to be sure and bring an answer; and Parsons had told him that Sir Rupert had had no dinner! had sent an excuse to Captain Torrens at the last moment.

Well, as far as he was concerned, he would not lose his dinner nor his beer for the best woman that ever stood in shoe leather.

"Then you did not see Miss Brown, Griggs?" said Sir Rupert, who could hardly realise his disappointment.

"No, Sir Rupert; she were up in the doring-room. She never came down. I never set eyes on her, but I heard her singing."

Singing! This was a cruel piece of gratuitous information. With a hasty wave of his hand Sir Rupert dismissed Mr. Griggs, and sat down to collect his scattered thoughts.

Firstly, had Helen been revenging herself for the past? Had she feigned a spurious interest, a mock forgiveness, in order the more cruelly to dash his hopes to the ground?

She was a born actress—she certainly was! How well she had played the rôle of governess! how well she fulfilled her part now of the rich heiress—the great beauty.

Nothing could be easier for her than to assume the title rôle she had played in the shady walk that very afternoon! Acting was her speciality.

She had assumed an appearance of more than

friendly interest; she had blushed, and trembled and hesitated!

Bah! it was all put on—it must have been!—when she sent no reply to his letter—a letter conveying the out-pourings of his heart, his humblest submission, and his entreaties—not even for absolute pardon, but for just one line to take away with him to say that when he returned he might dare to number himself among her friends!

She sent no answer—not even one word, but went to the piano and sang!—sang, doubtless, a loud pean of triumph, a kind of "Io Triumphi!" over her credulous and miserable victim!

This was one view of the matter, and a very unpleasant one. There was another that presented itself in its turn before his mental vision—could Blanche the fair have been false?

Could she have intercepted his note or Helen's for her own private ends?

But no! He put the idea from him with scorn. He actually blushed to think that he could have dared to impute such a vile action to any woman—and, worse still, to his own cousin!

Then there was still one other alternative, and that was the pleasantest, and for this reason he dwelt on it the longest.

Helen might have had no time to reply—probably the drawing-room was full of guests. That would account for her singing.

He would write the letter in her own apartment, and it would come to him by the early post.

It was curious that they should both build their expectations on the early post; and they were both painfully disappointed, as we already know.

The next afternoon Sir Rupert was at sea—was steaming down the Irish Channel on board the *Chimborazo*.

As the coast of Wales receded from his view he felt an odd curious pang of regret.

He was deliberately putting the seas between himself and Helen; and already the salt water had worked a change in his feelings.

Too late he regretted that he had not stayed at home, braved Torrens's wrath, cried off at the eleventh hour, and gone in person and had a face-to-face interview with his fickle, former fiancée!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was a lovely early autumn morning when Sir Rupert and his friend steamed out of Southampton harbour on board the *Chimborazo*.

The *Chimborazo* was a favourite steamer, and carried a number of passengers, chiefly Spanish and Americans, and not a few Brazilian beauties returning from a round of sight-seeing in the old world; but the ladies found Sir Rupert Lynn strangely cold and unsympathetic, and seriously indifferent to the charms of the fair sex (for such an exceedingly handsome young man, with such undeniable openings for making himself agreeable).

His looks belied him; he was taciturn; he was morose; he preferred spending hours in company with his own thoughts and smoking dozens of cigarettes to endeavouring to beguile the sunny days in pleasant society.

Captain Torrens was more amenable, and appeared only too glad to make the most of the golden opportunity.

He talked, he told stories, he promenaded the deck, he played cards and dominoes, he sang, he flirted, and made himself very popular with more than one dark-eyed senorita; whilst his companion spent most of his time sullenly smoking, leaning his elbows on the bulwarks, and gazing moodily on the dark blue horizon, and was voted a bear!

At St. Thomas they changed steamers, and a few days later they are really approaching the warm shores of South America.

The remaining hours are devoted to packing, making tender promises of meeting or writing, to paying the steward's bills, and to discussing the merits and demerits of various rival hotels.

The harbour of Rio is one of the largest and finest in the world, and looked its very best as the vessel slowly steamed up the river in the white tropical moonlight.

Soon they had cast anchor, and were besieged by a cloud of noisy boats, clamorous for passengers—boats embarking dark swarthy men in white clothes, and wide palm-leaf hats, who talked sonorous Spanish and animated Portuguese, who came to greet and welcome various señors and señoras.

One of these gentlemen claimed Captain Torrens as an old friend. This was by no means Captain Torrens's first visit to the Brazil; and when he and his companion had collected their baggage he carried them off in triumph to his villa in the neighbourhood of Rio.

He was Señor Carvalho, one of the working partners in the Donna Bianca silver mine, and hospitably insisted that (at any rate for the present) Captain Torrens and the other Ingleses would make themselves at home at Santa Catherina—the name of his magnificent country house.

Señor's family consisted of his wife, two unmarried daughters, and one son; and Sir Rupert when he had got the throbbing of the engines out of his head, and had a long night's rest, could not refrain from endorsing Captain Torrens's encomiums, and admitting that they had fallen on their legs, and found an admirable billet.

The cooking, of its kind, was undeniable; their apartments combined coolness and comfort; the ladies of the house were graciousness itself.

Santa Catherina was a large, green-shuttered, flat-roofed, white house, built round a colonnaded courtyard in the good old Spanish fashion, and surrounded by fragrant groves of orange trees and bananas.

The lower part of the villa was screened from public gaze by broad, latticed verandahs, which also ran round the interior of the courtyard, over which masses of glossy-leaved creepers, and scarlet, white, and purple passion-flowers tumbled in wild profusion.

Señor Carvalho and Captain Torrens have gone down into Rio on business.

An hour ago they rode down the steep, white road mounted on two handsome mustangs, and Sir Rupert is left behind.

Senorita Mécodes and Senorita Inez have promised that they will do their best to entertain him, and he is in good hands.

They are both exceedingly handsome girls, of the Spanish type, with black hair, indescribably graceful movements, and splendid dark eyes—soft and melting—girls who have been educated at a convent in Paris, and who speak the most charming broken English; and even Sir Rupert is obliged to admit to himself that nothing can be prettier than the picture on which his eyes are resting.

Senorita Mécodes is slowly awaying to-and-fro in a grass hammock, which is hung between two of the white pillars of the verandah.

It hangs so low that, with the aid of a tiny silken-shod foot, she is able to keep moving, and slowly fans herself as the long, slender hammock sways to-and-fro with a kind of rhythm to her sister's guitar.

Her sister who is sitting in a very low basket-chair, and accompanying herself in a charming little Spanish ballad—a ballad that goes with a most taking time and tune, and that seems to be devoted to the heart-hunger of some hapless donna in distant Castile.

The two young Spanish-Americans are not in the least bit shy; they are prepared to ride with, to sing to, to flirt with, their father's foreign friends.

The dark one is of a type quite unknown to these fair daughters of the south. He is pre-occupied although he is polite—he is unresponsive—he fails to understand the language of the fan, and, more amazing still, the language of the eye.

They have settled between themselves that he has a love affair—some ice-hearted fair Ingles in the background.

This alone will amply account for his extraordinary reserve and self-command.

He has been with them ten days. He has sung with them, danced with them, ridden with them—he is a magnificent horseman, even their brother Carlo admits that—and he has not once allowed himself to be inveigled into the gentle manœuvres of a flirtation.

He might make himself pleasant—they don't want to marry him. *Madre de Dios!* he is a heretic and a foreigner!

But why is he so persistently silent, and grave, and glum?

(Ah! Miss Blanche Despard could tell them the reason.)

Four months later Sir Rupert is riding once more through the streets of Rio, steering his horse through crowds of gaudily-dressed negroes, clamouring fruit-sellers, and discontented looking half-breeds.

You would never recognise him, but would take him for a Spanish gentleman, with his bronzed face, his black beard, sombrero and poncho!

He rides a magnificent black-brown horse, and is conversing eagerly and cheerfully with his friend Captain Torrens.

Captain Torrens has not borne the alteration so well; his beard is thin and irregular, and his light blue eyes stand out with quite a comic expression from his dark, mahogany face; they have had a most successful trip—business and pleasure have been happily combined—they have seen the mines, they have crossed treeless plains giving pasture to herds of wild cattle; they have been hospitably entertained at many a lonely and out-of-the-way hacienda; they have traversed vast forests of caoutchouc trees and mahogany, and shot the implacable jaguar—the hideous alligator—the harmless humming-bird—and now that labour's o'er are about to rest and relate their adventures in the bosom of the family at Santa Catherine.

After five months roughing it—far from the haunts of civilization—Sir Rupert is unfeignedly pleased to see his two pretty Spanish friends again, and feels that on a former occasion he was rudely and stupidly indifferent to their charms.

Certainly they have nothing to complain of now. He seems disposed to more than make amends for his past unsociability, and they confess to each other that he is a most charming and delightful cavalier.

Mérodée has an affianced lover, who looks coldly on the handsome Englishman, and has given her unmistakably to understand that her enthusiasm must be cooled.

Inez has several declared and undeclared admirers; but, partly to pique them, and partly to please herself, she no longer receives their compliments and flowers with gracious and impartial favour.

No; all her smiles are given to the new arrival, and there is a good deal of sonorous swearing, and one or two very ugly threats among the senorita's circle of discarded admirers.

Where is the duenna all this time? naturally occurs to the reader's mind. Senora Carvalho filled that post herself; but she was easy-going, extremely indolent, and incredibly fat, and left her daughters a good deal to themselves.

How could she be expected to climb the roof on moonlight nights, and gaze at the stars with Inez and Senor Ruperto?

Could a woman of her age and years be asked to take the saddle and accompany them for miles into the country?

At dances it was different; and the padre, her husband, had a high opinion of all Englishmen—they were to be trusted; and no one could look into Senor Ruperto's dark eyes and believe for a moment that he was anything but a mirror of chivalry.

There is a good deal of pleasant intimacy induced between two young people by star-gazing and guitar-playing; and Sir Rupert, thanks to Inez's instructions, was now quite an accomplished performer.

He liked and admired his fair teacher immensely—indeed once or twice he had asked himself if liking was not too cold a term for his feelings.

She was lovely in her own style—white, brilliant teeth, magnificent eyes—and what a figure!

But he shuddered when her mother's proportions came before his mental vision—and the madré had been a great beauty in her day!

Inez, though very bewitching and very beautiful, was shallow and ignorant; her education did not extend very far beyond dancing and guitar-playing.

She resembled some brilliant tropical flower, who would bloom and flourish in her own country; but transplanted to cold England how would it be with her?

How would the half-educated volatile Brazilian accustom herself to high-bred, highly-polished, highly-inquisitive English dames? Then, too, she was a Roman Catholic.

No, no; it was not to be thought of—it would never do! Charming as were their rides and their music lessons, he would be glad when Torrens had completed his business, and they could once more set their faces towards their native land.

And the fair Inez? Alas she had been hoist with her own petard. She had meant that the Senor Inglês should fall madly in love with her, and lo! the cases were reversed.

She was distractedly in love with him. The bare idea of his leaving Rio—leaving Rio without her—threw her into a frenzy of despair.

Sir Rupert had tried to blind himself to this change in his pretty friend; he told himself that flirtation was the very breath of her nostrils, to a girl like Inez—that she really did not care a straw for him, nor he for her.

True, her eyes told a very different tale; but that went for nothing with a Brazilian beauty. However, her eyes were shortly supplemented by her tongue, and she became not only exacting, but jealous and arbitrary. She could not bear to see him speak to any other lady—not even her own sister. To walk with, dance with, sing with, another girl, caused a stormy and tearful scene of remonstrance.

Certainly things were becoming very unpleasant for Sir Rupert Lynn. He had never declared himself in any way, and yet the senorita seemed to consider him her exclusive property, and treated him entirely as an accepted suitor.

The phlegmatic senorita had been asking pointed questions about his relations—his family—his means! Surely she never seriously entertained the idea that he wished to carry her daughter across the seas, and introduce her to his people as Lady Lynn!

Sir Rupert was, if anything, too sensitive and too chivalrous; he could not bear to give pain to a woman—he shrank from administering a rebuff to his beautiful young hostess.

What was the most delicate neutrality on his part—what was absolutely demanded by common politeness—the sanguine Inez accepted for acquiescence, if not actually a warm reciprocation of her feelings.

These Inglêse were a cold-blooded race, she said to herself—they could not love like the people under the line, but by all accounts their love lasted longer.

Affairs soon came to a crisis. Sir Rupert could not blind himself to the fact that some sort of storm was brewing after an interview that he had with his fair friend one tropical afternoon.

They had been a portion of a large riding party to an old deserted hacienda about ten miles away.

A very merry dainty meal had been discussed in the grass-grown garden, and at its conclusion every one had roamed about the place—some into the gloomy, shattered house, some into the courtyard, some further afield.

Sir Rupert and Inez were among the latter. They sauntered down mossy walks, down broken steps, and finally came to anchor under a wide-spreading tree, that seemed almost to grow into the boundary wall.

Seating herself suddenly, Inez said,—
"Is it not odd that this place is shut up? No one will live here."

"And why not?" inquired Sir Rupert, looking back up the garden and surveying the premises.

"Ghosts, or the evil eye!" laughing. "It has been a fine place in its time."

"Oh, you may laugh!" returned Inez, with a pout, "but there are ghosts, and there is an evil eye. Fernando Sandello says that that house"—nodding her head—"has such a bad name that although it is so near the town and so cheap no one has lived in it for twenty years. People have tried, but a week has been enough for any one—sometimes one night. Hush!"—with a start—"what is that moving among the bananas?"

seizing her companion's arm, convulsively.

"Nothing but the wind. You are full of superstitious fancies. What is the wonderful story about the house? Believe me that the ghosts are nothing more or less than rats."

"Are they!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "You would not say that if you were to see them."

"Them—are there more than one?" he asked, with a smile. "In England you never see more than one at a time!"

"There are two there," she returned, with deepest gravity, nodding her head towards the grey, weather-stained building, "a man and a girl. He murdered her—stabbed her. He was jealous."

"The brute! I hope he was hanged!" exclaimed Sir Rupert, poking up some weeds with the end of his riding-cane.

"Ah! you English don't understand what jealousy means—you make no allowance."

"I make no allowance certainly for any man who could murder a defenceless woman," replied Sir Rupert, emphatically.

"Not when she had given him cause for jealousy!" inquired his fair companion, with wide open eyes.

"Not even then could I understand it!" he replied, with unmoved countenance.

"Well, I can," she replied fiercely. "I myself could kill anyone who came between me and my love."

Then reaching for a pomegranate blossom, which she held to her lips, she added, after a pause, in a lower, softer key,—

"For instance, I could murder any woman who dared come between me—and you!"

This was certainly a very startling announcement, but it fell in quite the most natural manner from the senorita's pretty red lips.

Sir Rupert removed his wide-leaved sombrero, passed his hand across his forehead, and looked uneasily at his companion.

"I could be jealous, I can tell you," she proceeded, in a confident, half-boastful tone. "Father Pedro tells me that I have a devil within me, and though you might not think it, Ruperto, care, I am sure I have at times. You can't think how I felt at that bal masque when I saw you dancing so often with Carmina Salvini. I felt inclined to take a knife and stab her," she concluded, in a tone of angry conviction.

"Of course you are joking, you never felt anything of the kind!" said Sir Rupert, gravely, but as he looked down into the dark orbs beside him he felt a conviction that they were the windows from which a fiery, implacable nature looked forth—that in the fair bosom of the slender Spanish girl in the grey habit, who was leaning her back against the old tree, and looking straight up into his eyes, there was a large supply of incandescent lava, which might some day or other burst and carry all before it.

"Tell me," she said, abruptly, laying her hand on his arm, "did you ever love a girl in your own country?"

This was indeed a crucial question, and her companion changed countenance beneath the eager scrutiny of her questioning eyes.

"Ah! I see you did! What was she like? Who was she? What came between you?" she asked, eagerly, in her own tongue.

For some seconds she received no answer. Sir Rupert's gaze was fastened on the horizon, and there was a fixed resolve in his look that the fair Inez failed to interpret correctly.

"Did she prove untrue?" approaching him and laying her face sympathetically on his arm.

"Yes," he answered, shortly, drawing his arm away by a brusque movement. "She—but never mind, why should we speak of her?"

Then after a long pause the senorita spoke again,—

"Is it true what Captain Torrens told me this morning—that—that you are anxious to go home—to go back to England?" she asked, in a curious voice.

"Yes, we have overstayed our time as it is. We really must make a start soon."

"And is this the way you can talk—must make a start soon, are anxious to go, when you know you will be leaving me behind! Oh! how can you?" suddenly bursting into a storm of sobs, and simultaneously casting herself into his reluctant arms. "If you go and leave me you will break my heart!"

Sir Rupert now found himself in a very embarrassing situation. What in the world was he to do with this girl who had thrown herself into his arms and declared that her heart was breaking! He must speak out, and at once.

"My dear Inez," he began, in a tone of gentle expostulation, "you don't know what you are saying; you are overwrought, you are not yourself, trying to disengage her, and trying in vain. 'We are good friends, and we have spent a very pleasant month in your father's house, and I shall never forget all your hospitality and kindness; but when you say that you will break your heart at my departure I know that—that you must be joking.'"

"Do you mean that you don't understand me?" cried Inez, drawing suddenly back and glaring at him with blazing eyes and the air of a young Pythoness. "Do you mean to tell me that you do not love me! answer me!" with a stamp of her foot.

"I have a very sincere regard for you as a friend, but—but—why should I deceive you? I do not love you. All that sort of thing is over for me. I can never love twice."

"Then, Santa Dios! what is to become of me?" cried his companion, clasping her hands together in an agony of despair. "Why did I ever see you! why did you make my soul your own! 'Madre adorata!' cried this excitable young lady, 'I shall go mad! I shall die!' and without a second's warning she cast herself prone in the long grass at his feet in an utter abandonment of misery, and in a paroxysm of unutterable grief."

Far from being proud of his conquest her companion felt a horrible qualm of pain and humiliation to think that this untutored daughter of the south, this child of unrestrained emotions, should so far forget her womanly instincts as to fling her heart and herself at the feet of a man undesired and unasked.

The sobbing senorita, far from melting him to tenderness, simply overwhelmed him with repulsion and shame.

However, he lost no time in raising her and replacing her in her former seat, and soothing her by all the means in his power.

When her long drawn sobs and gasps had somewhat subsided he spoke to her very seriously and earnestly.

In a few words as possible he stretched the outline of his own disastrous love affair. He gave her his confidence unreservedly—told her how he had doubted and cast off his only love, and that now she in return had abandoned him.

"But I can never care for anyone else," he proceeded, resolutely, "never! I only wish I could with all my heart, but it would be useless to try. If I were to endeavour to forget her in making love to any girl her face would always come between us."

"Then she must be bad—she must!" cried Inez. "She must have the evil eye. She won't marry you herself, nor let you marry anyone else!"

For fully half-an-hour Sir Rupert talked to his unhappy companion—talked to her like a brother—talked common sense; and at the end of that time, thanks to his eloquence, his air of firm resolution, and his absolute self-command, the fair Inez was fully convinced that the case was hopeless.

The chevalier at her side had bestowed every grain of his affections on a pale-faced English donna, and, as far as she was concerned, his

heart was as hard as the marble steps at their feet.

Well, there was no more to be said—no use in striving with the impossible. It was cruel of fate—too cruel. This was the third disappointment she had met with—for Inez was a young lady of very inflammable disposition, and had twice before fixed her hopes on the unattainable.

Once these hopes had been centred in one of the Emperor's aide-de-camps—once in a charming French Count; but neither of her former lovers had been as irresponsible or as cold and as hard-hearted as this Englishman.

A few minutes later they were wending their way across the grass, down the shallow steps, and up the mossy walks through a tangled mass of lovely, neglected tropical shrubs and flowers, who were loading the evening air with their rich heavy perfume, and in some places actually barricaded the narrow overgrown walks.

The moon was up, and the party already contemplating a speedy departure, when Sir Rupert and Inez passed out of the garden wilderness into the moon-flooded court-yard.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR RUPERT, not unnaturally, avoided Senorita Inez Carvalho en route home. He fell behind as they entered a narrow track in the forest, and gradually drew back until he brought up the rear alone.

He was riding, with his hat off, at a fast pace, and buried in some not very agreeable reflections, when he was suddenly roused out of himself by finding that another equestrian was alongside of his horse—a man with whom he had a slight acquaintance (and one of Inez's former rejected admirers)—a Brazilian *pur et simple*, with a peaked black beard and narrow slits of black eyes placed very close together in a very thin, sallow face.

"I have to congratulate Senor Ruperto," he said, doffing his *sombrero*, and reining his horse in with the other hand—"on his conquest. How fortunate the cavaliero must think himself to carry away the affections of one of our Rio belles!" a certain *souçon* of rancour in his tongue.

"I don't know what you mean!" returned Sir Rupert, brusquely. "You must speak plainer."

"The senor," returned the other with an evil sneer, "will doubtless understand me when I tell him that I was behind the plane-tree this afternoon, and saw all."

Sir Rupert for a moment could not find speech.

"Yes," he proceeded, glaring into the other's eyes, and bringing out each word as if it were a dagger, "I saw the senorita throw herself into your arms. I heard her offer herself and her love. I even beheld her at your feet!"

"If you did," returned his companion, boldly, "I am sure you are a gentleman, and will never again let what you have just told me pass your lips. I may rely on you, I know."

"Yes, you may rely on me!" responded Senor Pasco, in a peculiar tone.

"She was under a mistake—a delusion. It was a slight hysterical attack, and the sooner we all forget it the better," making a movement as though he would canter on.

"Not so fast, my gay cavalier!" cried the other, resting his hand fiercely on his rein. "You have not told me if you love the beautiful Inez!"

"What is that to you?" returned Sir Rupert angrily. "Why should we talk of her? What is she to you?"

"Everything! for I love her myself," replied Senor Pasco, drily.

"Oh, you do—do you?" in a somewhat lenient voice.

"Yes; and you have stepped in, gained her affections, and tossed them aside like a worn-out glove. For this," he added, with a slow and deadly smile, "I am going to give you a lesson—a lesson that will show you that gay young travelling Ingleses may not come here and gather and

trample on an honest man's belongings"—raising his voice—"I am going to kill you."

Sir Rupert was a man of iron courage, but he naturally put his hand on his holsters—they were empty!

"No, no! not in that way," readily interpreting the movement. "I do not mean to murder you—the duello will be just as efficacious. My second will wait on you to-night."

"But do you think that I am going to fight you, and to have Senorita Inez's name dragged in the mud? Do you think I am a madman?" demanded Rupert sternly.

"I think," said the other, rising in his peaked saddle, and speaking with indescribable scorn, "I think that if you are not a madman you are a coward—and take that," dealing him such a sudden, heavy blow across the mouth that it caused him to reel in his saddle; and before Sir Rupert could recover his late challenger had galloped down a glade, and was lost to sight.

After this insult there was no alternative.

Sir Rupert would listen to no expostulations from his friend—who talked himself nearly hoarse that night, as he paced Sir Rupert's tessellated apartment from end to end.

"It is monstrous—the idea of going out with a sweep like that—the idea of fighting a duel in these days! Think of what everyone at home will say! They will say you are mad—and that I was a criminal to permit it to take place!" with angry intonation. "Supposing you fall—you are the very last of your family—the name becomes extinct!"

"Someone must be the last of a family sometimes," returned the last of the Lynns, composedly; "and I don't think it matters."

In fact, Sir Rupert's unusually calm was consumed by a sense of raging passion, and an insensate craving to wipe out the insult that had been offered him that afternoon.

"The *Cotopaxi* sails to-morrow, you know!" pursued his friend. "You might go in her. Why not? What's the good of risking your life for a mere—"

"Thank you, Torrens," interrupted Sir Rupert quietly. "I had no idea that you held such a high opinion of me and of my courage! I am to turn craven—to run away from this black-guard in to-morrow's steamer. It would be a disgrace to the name of Englishman, not to speak of the name of *Lynn*. I would ten times rather leave my bones out here than live a long life under such a stigma. I would never know an hour's peace. I would feel like a beaten hound to the rest of my days. Duels are exploded in England; but here we must do as Rome does. Fancy the agreeable notoriety I would gain if I were to be handed down to posterity as the Englishman who was challenged by a Brazilian—and who ran away. No! no! better be the last of my line than that! I feel the fellow's blow is scorching into my very bone—that I shall never rest until I have had some redress!" he exclaimed, fiercely.

"And suppose you fall!" exclaimed his friend, angrily; "supposing this time to-morrow we have buried you in the English cemetery."

"Supposing you have!" replied Sir Rupert, quietly. "At any rate you will have the satisfaction of burying a man of honour."

"And you are to fight with swords—and he is the most accomplished fencer in the country—he will spit you like a sparrow," continued Captain Torrens, gloomily. "He is as wiry and as agile as a monkey. The little brute!"

"You forget that I was in a cavalry regiment—and can fence a bit, too, Torrens," said his principal, mildly. "You must not give me over yet; and should I be wounded to-morrow, Tor, I want you to promise me one thing!"

"What!" very impatiently, and with an exceedingly ill grace.

"Take me straight on board the *Cotopaxi*. There they have an English surgeon on board, and it will be all the same to me whether I am on sea or on land—it will be better than being laid up in an hotel—and whatever happens don't let me be brought back to Santa Catharina."

He shrank sensitively from being received on the footing of an interesting invalid and of being

nursed to convalescence by the too appreciative Iles.

"I never met with such a cold-blooded matter-of-fact fellow in my life," returned Captain Torrens, indignantly. "Why need you run the chance of being wounded—if not killed—from a mere spurious sense of honour!"

And he began all his arguments over again. The Brazilian was not Sir Rupert's equal; he was not even a gentleman; he sought the quarrel to gratify his feelings of injured vanity; and was Sir Rupert to fall the victim to the overbearing arrogance of a fourth-class Brazilian wine merchant.

However, he talked to the wind, his friend was deaf as the traditional adder; and just as the faintest streaks of dawn were glimmering above the horizon they sallied forth in dead silence for the place of meeting.

It was about a mile away, under the walls of an old white convent on the banks of the magnificent Rio Grande.

They rode along between palms and cactus, past dusty India-rubber trees and high walls and big gateways, till they came within sight of the rendezvous.

They were the first in the field; it was a chilly raw morning; a damp, white, cool mist still overhung the river and the plains like a gauzy pall or veil, soon to be dispersed by the bold young sun.

In five minutes more the other party (which included a doctor) had ridden up, and the combatants were confronting each other in their shirt-sleeves, eye-to-eye and foot-to-foot.

The Englishman was not altogether such an easy prey as Senor Pasco had reckoned on. True, he was immeasurably his own inferior, but he was tall and active, ready and cool; he lacked the wonderful dexterity of wrist that signalized the Brazilian, his cat-like litheness, his skill of feint, but he possessed indisputably a cool head, and a brave heart.

What would any of Sir Rupert's London friends say could they behold him now! The club *habitué*, the lounge in the Row, the keenest in the first flight, the perfect type of a calm, sensible, self-contained young Englishman, standing here by the river in the misty morning air, with the weapon of an adversary playing all around him like steel-lightning, and all because of a little dark-eyed coquette, for whom he did not care two straws.

It was all very well to say so, but what would Helen have thought had she been suddenly transplanted to the land of passion-flowers and diamonds and palms!

Senor Pasco had lost his temper; the calm, unmoved manner in which the stranger parried and stopped his most deadly thrusts, acting merely on the defensive, threw him into a white fury.

He became wild, he became incautious, he became impetuous; and Sir Rupert, seeing his advantage, pressed home and gave his adversary a very ugly cut in the fore-arm.

It was first blood, and it acted as a charm on Senor Pasco. He became once more stealthy and collected; he resembled the jaguar of his own forests in creeping, and stealing, and springing; he cursed, he swore, he sprang here and there as though on wires, delivering each thrust with a blood-curdling oath.

He wore out his unpractised adversary, and seizing his moment with an exclamation of triumph buried his weapon in Sir Rupert's chest.

He did not wait to know if the wound was pronounced fatal. He merely wiped his sword, cast one glance of exultant hatred at the figure on the ground, whose life-blood was fast ebbing through his white shirt-front, now out-rivalled in colour by his face, and, calling for his horse, assuming his poncho and sombrero, he lightly leapt into the saddle, and gaily galloped off.

The *Otopaxi* did carry away the traveller, after all. Captain Torrens was resolute. He refused to listen to the combined entreaties, expostulations, and lamentations of the Carvalho family, and he bore away his friend in despite of a most animated resistance.

It was very likely that he would die. He was

wounded in the lungs, and the ship-surgeon had but a very faint hope of his recovery.

Of course the deed was hushed up as much as possible, but the more it was hushed up the more it was talked about—talked about secretly, confidentially, and mysteriously.

Very various were the reasons assigned. After the first real cause was settled (a woman, of course)—the Senorita Inez Carvalho. Equally, of course, amazing stories kept floating about colonnades and verandahs. And if these stories could only have been confined to the Brazil it did not greatly matter; but why—oh, malicious fate!—did some side-wind carry the news to Europe—enlarged! Why was there a paragraph in a certain society paper! Why was it whispered over various pretty tea-tables, in more than one club window, "that Rupert Lynn—such a good looking fellow!—had got into a nasty scrape out in Rio about a Spanish girl; had been called out by her brother, and was badly wounded in the lungs, and lay at St. Thomas not expected to recover!"

Need you ask if this came to Miss Brown's pretty little shell-like ears? Of course it did!

(To be continued.)

HOW IT HAPPENED.

—10:—

THE Delancys were, unfortunately, poor—very much poorer than any one suspected, which was, in a certain sense, more unfortunate still, for it necessitated the struggle for "appearances" which is so terribly exhaustive to sensitive persons. The Delancys were extremely sensitive. They could endure cold, hunger, and any ordinary deprivation with heroic fortitude, so long as the outside world remained in ignorance of the fact. To keep them in ignorance, to invest with an appearance of luxury the meagre reality behind it, had been for a good half a score of years their "being's end and aim."

Yet the world—the keen-eyed and keen-scented world—was but partially deceived. It laughed at their efforts, but did not, with all its astuteness, guess ever so faintly at the superhumanness of those efforts.

Therefore when Nina Delancy received an invitation to reside permanently or at least spend the first three months of the new year with Mrs. Santley, it was considered that Fortune had at last condescended to bestow a favour upon them.

To be sure Hollywood wasn't much of a place, and Mrs. Santley was neither wealthy nor distinguished—was, in short, only a very passable sort of person, socially considered, with some very strait-laced notions, and a great many curious little angles in her composition—nevertheless circumstances rendered the acceptance of the invitation desirable.

Mrs. Santley's husband had been some sort of a distant relative of Mrs. Delancy, and the families, though never intimate, had maintained a kind of formal friendliness, culminating at long intervals in as formal visits.

Since her husband's death, however, Mrs. Santley had not been to London, though she had written three times in the two years, and the letters were, as Kate Delancy expressed it, "more like her than she was herself."

As we have only to do with the last, we will take the liberty of transcribing it.

"RESPECTED FRIENDS," it ran, "it has occurred to me that Nina might like to 'live in the country.' Hollywood is always dull and dreary—unusually dull and dreary this year—but a little dullness is better than the doubtful morality of the fashionable resorts in London for a young girl, who, it is to be hoped, is not quite spoiled yet by the vanities and wickedness of the world—though I am by no means certain of it. If my memory serves me, Nina is seventeen years of age—a mere child, but very likely thinking herself a woman—girls are so forward now. If you like for her to come to Hollywood and make my home her own I should be much pleased to have

her come. I should advise her to leave her finery at home—there are no simptoms here to be astonished or charmed. If she can't make up her mind to stay at least three months she had better not take the trouble to come at all. Enclosed you will find a banknote to pay all necessary expenses of the journey, I shall send Frank to the station to meet her at midday on New Year's Eve, Providence permitting.

"Very respectfully

"Your most obedient servant,

"MARIA SANTLEY."

Now as Nina was the youngest of four sisters, and as the great question of existence for them all had nearly driven the paternal Delancy distracted, it was, as I have said, considered desirable to accept this invitation which took one off his hands for at least three months, and which required no "outfit." Alicia, Kate and Clarice could divide between them Nina's share, and thus make a very presentable appearance.

I doubt if Mrs. Santley ever stood quite so favourably in the regards of the Delancys before as on the reception of this rather ungracious letter. It was like a New Year's gift to them, and one mustn't be too particular about phrases where such vital interests as funds are concerned. They all agreed upon this—all but Nina.

Would you mind my introducing Nina to you if I will promise not to be tiresome about it!

A lithe willow figure—graceful, and yet with a certain decision and independence in the light, firm step and proudly poised head, a fair complexion, with wild-rose tints in the cheeks, deepening to coral in the full curved lips, the softest of golden-brown hair, matched by eyes of the same soft, rare shade, with finely cut features delicate and refined, but not haughty, and you have Nina Delancy as she looked standing framed in the long western window, and gazing absently off into the hazy distance, the evening after the reception of the letter from Hollywood.

And yet you can get but a meagre idea of her from this portraiture, for it was the girl's warm, impulsive heart that gave to her face its changeable expression, which constituted its greatest charm.

"Nina," exclaimed Kate, rebukingly, "you look as if you were sorry at this piece of good fortune."

"If I thought Mrs. Santley really wished me to come—" Nina began hesitatingly.

"Oh, nonsense!" interrupted Alicia, impatiently. "As if she would do a thing she didn't wish to, you sensitive little goose!"

"But there doesn't seem any heart in the invitation," Nina responded faintly.

"You unreasonable child!" cried Kate, with a laugh, "to expect anything in that line from our venerated relative. How can one give what they have not got pray?"

"Oh, hush, Katy!" Nina exclaimed in a shocked voice. "I am sure she is very good to think of us at all."

"Good! Oh, yes, there's no doubt on that point; she's a perfect paragon of goodness. All the 'vanities and wickednesses' which beset ordinary mortals fall harmlessly upon her. So completely entrenched is she in this armour of 'goodness' that nothing can reach her through it. I expect it is only another proof of my innate depravity, but I do not like those dreadfully 'good people.' If I needed help or sympathy I would far sooner go to one who through experience knew my needs and was thus qualified to help me, and who would not instead give me a chap'er of homilies upon the follies and shortcomings of humanity generally, very evidently meaning I should make a personal application of the same."

"Oh, Kate, please do not talk so," Nina said, softly. "I am afraid it is wicked, and I know it is uncharitable. It is a life of folly and vanity this life we live. I feel it more and more every day," and, smiling faintly, added, "I am going to leave it behind me with my 'finery' when I go to Hollywood."

"Nina," said Clarice, wheeling suddenly round on the piano stool, "haven't our respected relative a nephew, or some such connection, who has taken orders? I've a faint recollection, to that

effect. Possibly this benevolent friend of the family knowing the straits to which we are sometimes put, has selected you as a wife for him. I daresay he is fifty, a widower, wears spectacles, has long, lank, sandy-grey hair, a stoop in the shoulders, and a chronic melancholy radiating like a halo from his cadaverous face. But what does it matter how one looks? 'Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain,' you know, and as you are the only one in the family who possesses the martyr-spirit to any remarkable degree, it is naturally expected of you that you will sacrifice yourself on the altar of duty, thus securing an 'eligible settlement,' as mamma says, a model husband and a summer resort for your less fortunate elder sisters. Verily, Nin, you are favoured, for doesn't somebody say 'whom the gods love marry young' or something which amounts to substantially the same thing, practically considered. I'm most devoutly thankful the worthy dame didn't select me for the honour nevertheless."

And pretty Clarice Delancy, the belle of the family, by the way, shrugged her white shoulders in genuine French fashion.

"Oh, Clarice, please don't!" Nina cried, looking so ludicrously shocked and embarrassed that the girls all laughed in chorus, though Alice hastened to say with more feeling than she had often displayed, being one of those cool, dignified impressive persons not often betrayed into such weakness,—

"You are the only one of us good enough for a martyr, Nina, but I trust no such fate as Clarice depicts is in store for you. And I had rather have you at home a thousand times than to have the most beautiful things in the world if they are bought at the expense of your happiness. There is no obligation, I am sure, about accepting Mrs. Santley's invitation."

"Oh, I shouldn't dare think of refusing," Nina said hastily, "but—but the prospect isn't very delightful, I will admit. I daresay it will all end—"

"In a wedding," Clarice interrupted, gaily.

The express train from London came sweeping round the long bend at the foot of the hill, crossed the picturesque rivulet half hidden beneath hanging trees, and shot away to the little red-bricked building dignified by the name of the "Hollywood Station."

An ancient-looking vehicle, with horse and driver equally venerable, stood by the narrow platform in an unmistakable attitude of waiting.

The ancient Jehu, holding his horse by the bit rein—a precaution by the way wholly unnecessary, as the animal maintained the most stoical composure upon all occasions—glanced indifferently over to where a young lady was standing.

Frank Holman was not a ladies' man, but something in the sweet, earnest young face of the girl, shadowed just now by an expression of timidity and embarrassment, stirred all the latent gallantry in the man's nature, and, dropping the rein, he made his way straight through the few passengers and involuntarily touched his hat to the young girl, whose face suddenly lighted and cleared.

"You're Miss Delancy, aren't you?" he asked, gently.

"Yes," she replied, adding eagerly, "Has Mrs. Santley been expecting me? Did she send you?"

"Oh, yes, miss, she has fidgeted all the morning lest you shouldn't come."

Nina's heart gave a sudden bound, and the faded cushions of the waggnette failed to awaken one throb of regretful memory as she involuntarily contrasted them with the rich velvet and satin ones of the "family carriage," which her mother had rather go cold and hungry than give up.

Hollywood was a quiet, old-fashioned place, the highways clover bordered and irregular, the houses straight and prim, with grass-grown plots in front, and clumps of lilacs and daffodils under the windows.

How still and sweet the air was, with the dew just falling.

Nina drank in with rare delight the sweet, pastoral beauty of the scene. Sometimes, in picture galleries, she had caught glimpses of such a

world as this, but it had been to her more like some ideal of the artist's brain than a real, substantial world like this which now revealed itself to her actual vision.

She was roused from her reverie by a familiar face—the face of Mrs. Santley herself—looking out of an open window, and at the same moment Holman drew up in front of the house with its row of cherry trees in front, saying, sententiously,—

"Here we are, miss," as he leisurely dismounted.

There was the grating sound of a bolt being withdrawn, and a door opened, and Nina was looking up with a feeling of gratitude for the unexpected cordiality of her reception, when, to her dismay, a gentleman was coming down the path, and Mrs. Santley was not to be seen.

"Miss Delancy, I presume," he said, smiling, and immediately adding: "Aunt was very sure you would not come, and is very happily disappointed, though it will not be like her to tell you so. This way, Miss Delancy," he added, taking her shawl and preceding her up the path, while the coachman busied himself with her trunk.

Mrs. Santley came out into the hall to meet her, shook hands with her gravely, inquired formally after each member of the family, settled her cap strings, and sat down by the window and folded her hands.

Nina felt a great wave of chill and embarrassment surging up from her feet, and her face flushed painfully.

"Shall I call Lucy, aunt, to show Miss Delancy to her room?" the gentleman who had come out to meet her, said, looking in from the hall.

Mrs. Santley gave a little start which more than anything betrayed the undercurrent of excitement which possessed her.

"Certainly, Louis," she answered, almost sharply.

"And perhaps it would be as well for you to tell Miss Delancy who I am now as any other time, as it will have to be done eventually, I suppose," he added, laughingly. "considering that I am to be quartered on you for the present!"

The thin face of the aunt flushed, but she betrayed in no other way her mortification at this breach of etiquette of which she had been guilty.

"Miss Delancy," she said, in her most formal tones, "allow me to present to you my grand-nephew, Louis Denbeigh."

Mr. Denbeigh offered his hand with easy cordiality, and Nina lifted a very grateful face to him, though she did not herself know it.

The next morning she wrote home to let them know of her safe arrival. She wrote enthusiastically of Hollywood, but somehow forgot to make any allusion to Mr. Denbeigh.

Mrs. Santley took an early opportunity to inform Nina that Louis Denbeigh was a poor young curate who had his own way to make in the world, and was settled over only a small parish. She always invited him to spend his vacations in Hollywood, and she hoped Miss Delancy wouldn't mind him at all, as of course she wouldn't, their ways in life being so unlike, etc.

Nina, strangely enough, cried a good hour over this very insignificant thing, and resolved to be very cool and dignified towards Mr. Denbeigh in future. How well she might have kept this resolve if what did happen had not happened will, of course, never be known.

That same night Mrs. Santley was taken violently ill of a fever, and for more than a week her life was despaired of; but the fierce fever burned itself out at length, and she was pronounced convalescent.

These days and nights of watching and anxiety had revealed the real character of each to each more thoroughly than months of ordinary companionship would have done.

In the pleasant, quiet days of convalescence Mrs. Santley's little formalities and anguities of character fell away like harmless husks, revealing the real tenderness and depth of her nature.

To Louis it was not so much a surprise—he had always understood her better than any one

else; but to Nina Delancy it came like a wonderful revelation. Her warm, impulsive heart went out to the lonely little woman in a flood of grateful love.

How happy she had been at Hollywood after all, and what dismal forebodings she had had of it; she determined she would never go back to the old hollow, artificial life again, with its miserable little deceptions and petty make-shifts, its perpetual anxieties and worries and struggles, and all for what?

Somehow life had had a newer and deeper significance of late, and vague yearnings and aspirations for something nobler and better stirred in her soul and added a new grace to her manner, and a rarer sweetness to her face.

One day Louis Denbeigh undertook to tell her something of this, and by the oddest blunder in the world stumbled into an out-and-out declaration of love!

I wouldn't pretend that Nina was particularly shocked or sorry, but she was a painfully conscientious little thing, and it seemed to her a piece of arch treason against Mrs. Santley, who had invited her there in confidence, of which this seemed, somehow, a sort of breach or betrayal.

So Louis went straight to his aunt and told the whole story, Nina's misgivings and all. And what do you suppose this wronged and betrayed little woman did?

You wouldn't guess in a lifetime, and, though you may be shocked at her duplicity, I will tell you just what she did. She rubbed her thin hands together in enthusiasm, and cried, exultantly:

"Ah! your young eyes were very easily blinded! Don't you see I meant it from the beginning! And so it has all come out, has it?"

I am afraid that you will consider Mrs. Santley strangely inconsistent when I conclude by telling you that with all her horror of "finery," and the vanities of the world, she insisted on sending to Paris for Nina's *trousseau*, and after paying for it making her beside a present of five hundred pounds in bank-notes.

And this wasn't the sum of her deceptions. Louis Denbeigh, though settled over a small parish, had a most liberal salary, for the small parish was wealthy, and though it was true, as it is of every young man, that he had his own way to make, he had, nevertheless, the assistance of a handsome little fortune to do it with—a very convenient help, by the way.

I do not believe Nina, at the time, cared a single straw for Louis's fortune.

But you and I, dear reader, who have learned that neither man nor woman can live by love alone, can smile at her infatuation, knowing that sooner or later she will be very glad of it.

In regard to the "family," I may here add that they fully appreciated the little item mentioned above, particularly as it provided a nice summer resort for the girls, without the many discomforts of hotel life, especially the bills.

Clarice declared herself entitled to a place among the prophets, for had she not foretold all this when Mrs. Santley's invitation came? Possibly she had not exactly sketched her brother-in-law's *personelle*, but in regard to the "great essentials," she said, with a gay laugh, "she would challenge the whole army of astrologers to prophecy more correctly."

R. B. E.

WHEN 4 oz. of salt are dissolved in 40 oz. of water an egg a day old will sink to the bottom; one two days old will nearly reach the bottom; one three days old will float near the top; and one five or more days old will project above the surface more and more as it becomes older.

THERE is a plant in Jamaica called the life plant, because it is almost impossible to kill it, or any portion of it. When a leaf is cut off and hung up by a string it sends out white, thread-like roots, gathers moisture from the air, and begins to grow new leaves. Even when pressed and packed away by a botanist it has been known to outgrow the leaves of the book in which it was placed. The only way to kill it is by the heat of a hot iron or of boiling water.

THE LADY HELEN.

—101—

(Continued from page 537.)

"She is an angel; I think her very goodness made me hate her, because it showed me so plainly my own unworthiness. I have been a bad wife to you; now with death so near I see it and repent. You cannot love me any more—but if you could forgive."

"I do forgive you, freely," he answered huskily; "try now to forget any offences against me; at least let these last hours we spend together be without reproach, and without bitterness."

That same evening Helen arrived; in her generous heart there was no room for scorn or dislike any more; her dark eyes were full of divinest pity as they rested on the white beautiful face which smiles would never again illumine.

Crossing swiftly to the bed she bent down, saying,—

"My dear, oh my dear! I am so grieved, so very, very grieved," she kissed the pale lips. One slender arm stole up to encircle her neck.

"I might doubt another woman but I know you are truth itself. Helen, stay with me to the end; I am afraid to die alone, and the end is so dreadfully near."

"I will not leave you alone," Helen answered simply, and sat down beside her.

Through the next three days she nursed her unremittently, praying by day, entreating with her until the fear of death grew less, the hope of pardon greater.

On the third night Cora suddenly cried,—
"Quick! quick! send for Bernard. I am going and there is something I would say."

When he obeyed her summons she was sitting propped up in bed, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright. He went and stood by her right hand.

"Bernard, you would have married Helen if I had not come between; you did not even guess you loved her much, but you did even then, and since I have been your wife you have learned the truth—for you there is but one woman in the world, that woman is Helen. She has become more and more to you with each changing month—and she—just because she prized your happiness above and beyond all, lied to you about herself, she has loved you all along—"

As she paused Helen hid her crimson face among the pillows: it was all too true, and she was ashamed that her secret and her sacrifice should be revealed.

"All along," repeated Cora, "and surely she deserves her reward. When I am gone and a reasonable time has expired—I want you to ask her again the question she had already answered when first we met—I shall be glad to feel in dying that you are safe in the shelter of her love. Will you promise me so much?"

"If Helen will listen to me—yes," but he never glanced at his cousin.

Cora gave a little satisfied sigh, then she said,—

"If I had had better training perhaps I should have been a better woman—I don't know—but if you could give me the benefit of the doubt—if you would try to forget much that was evil in me, remembering the little good which leavened the whole, I should be grateful. I have plagued you often, now I shall never tease or vex you any more."

He gave her the assurance she craved, and then she remained quiet seeming to sleep, whilst they watched by her till the last great change came.

Towards dawn she slowly moved her head, as slowly breathed the one word "Pray," and Helen fell on her knees.

Even as she prayed the soul escaped from the poor maimed body; Cora Barstowe had gone over to the "great majority;" to be remembered by the wronged with pity in which love could have no part, and reverence no share.

They buried her with her little child; then Barstowe Hall was closed for awhile; so many painful memories were attached to it that Bernard was glad to turn his back upon it until a brighter time dawned.

Helen returned to her own home, not to waste the time of waiting in idle regrets and futile sorrow, but to labour for those around and about her, to fill her every hour with loving thought and earnest work so that the poor folks "rose up to call her blessed," and even the frivolous society women said "Helen is not of us, but she is a good woman—a little too good, perhaps—but one cannot help respecting her."

A year had passed since the tragic deaths of Lady Barstowe and her child; and a man who made his way along the Sandsea-road wondered anxiously in what wise he would be received.

He did not deserve mercy or love, yet he hoped and prayed for both.

Hesitatingly he entered the grounds, then he saw a figure approaching, and his heart beat fast.

The keen frosty air had fanned the usually pale cheeks into colour, the true eyes were full of a great abiding love and joy. He stretched out his hands, saying, "Helen! Helen!" and she went and laid hers on them.

"Am I forgiven? Can you trust me any more? I failed you miserably, but Cora was right, I loved you all the while. Helen! will you keep the old promise?"

"If you wish it," she gently answered, whilst her face drooped forward.

Leaning towards her he kissed her once upon the mouth.

"Thus I claim and seal you mine, and Heaven grant I may make you happy!"

"Dear Bernard, I am very happy now."

In the spring they were married, Lady Barstowe and her daughters returning to their old home, where they formed one happy family, being governed with loving government by the gentle hand of The Lady Helen!

(THE END.)

FACETIÆ.

"If you ever come within a mile of my house, stop there," said a hospitable man who was unfortunate in choosing his words.

ALPINE GUIDE: "And now, gentlemen, as soon as the ladies leave off talking you will hear the roar of the waterfall."

RACKETTE: "It struck me that little girl you had with you the other night was somewhat pensive." Rounder: "'X' pensive, my boy."

FIRST NURSE GIRL: "So you've got a new place?" SECOND NURSE GIRL: "Yea." "Do you like it?" "Like it! Why, it is right in front of the soldiers' barracks."

DR. PROBE: "My wife gave a Welsh rarebit party last night." DR. REAPER: "Was it a success?" DR. PROBE: "Immense. I've had twelve extra calls to-day."

NEW GIRL: "Do you burn the sweepings, mem?" MISTRESS: "You may sweep the dirt into the cupboards, Norah. We move the first of next month."

"It is queer, isn't it, that Mr. Binks spends all his evenings at the club?" She: "No; I always said he'd do everything he could for his wife's happiness."

SHE: "How fearful it must be for a great singer to know she has lost her voice!" HE: "It is much more torturing for the audience when she doesn't know it."

JACK and JILL went up the hill,

To fetch a pail of water;

Jack, he was the milkman's son,

And Jill the milkman's daughter.

MINNIE: "What do you understand by the term platonic affection?" MAMIE: "It usually means that the young man feels that he cannot afford to marry."

TWICKENHAM: "We're going to have some amateur theatricals at my house next week, and a big supper afterwards. Can you be there?" DASHAWAY: "I'll come, old man; but—er—I may be late!"

FATHER: "You must know, sir, that my daughter will get nothing from me until my death." SUITOR (pleasantly): "Oh, that's all right, sir; that's all right! I have enough to live on for two or three years."

SHE: "You must remember that ours was a summer engagement." HE: "That means, if you see anyone you like better, you'll break it!" "Yea." "And if I see anyone I like better—" "I'll sue you for breach of promise."

A SHOEMAKER was taken up for bigamy and brought before the sitting magistrate. "Which wife, some one asked, 'will he be obliged to take?'" "He is a cobbler, and, of course, must stick to his last," replied the magistrate.

SANDSTONE (despondently): "I have changed the engagement ring three times now, and she doesn't like it." CASTLETON: "What are you going to do about it?" Sandstone: "This time I think I'll change the girl."

JOHNNY: "What's the difference between a visit and a visitation?" PA: "A visit, my son, is when we go to see your grandmother on your mother's side." "Yea." "A visitation is when she comes to see us."

GLADYS: "Mamma, my teacher was talking about synonyms to-day. What is a synonym?" Mamma: "A synonym, darling, is a word you can use in place of another one when you do not know how to spell the other one."

MISS WITHERS: "When I was born my grandmother predicted that I would never live to be old. Sillington (wishing to be pleasant): "Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! What a good joke you must have on your grandmother."

STUCKLEY: "How long did it take you to become an actor, Wingley?" Wingley: "Five years." STUCKLEY: "Five years! Great Scott! How came you to take so long?" Wingley: "One year studying, and four years trying to get an engagement."

MANAGER: "I hate to say it, but the public seems to have lost all interest in you. Old Actor: "Tis true; too true. But I can easily disguise myself, and if you will kindly announce me as an ex-burglar, green-goods man, or pugilist, we'll take the town."

PLAYWRIGHT: "Is her acting natural?" Manager (enthusiastically): "Natural! Why, when she appeared as the dying mother last night an insurance agent, who has her life insured for two thousand pounds, and who was in the audience, actually fainted."

MISS ANTIQUE: "My dear, the alarming spread of microbic diseases has resulted in the starting of an Anti-Kissing Club. Will you permit me to propose you as a member?" Miss Youngthing: "Really, I—I have no time for clubs; but perhaps grandma will join."

AN English health officer recently received the following note from one of the residents of his district: "Dear Sir,—I beg to tell you that my child, aged eight months, is suffering from an attack of measles, as required by Act of Parliament."

MR. RICHMANN: "I don't demand that my daughter shall marry wealth, but I do insist that the man she marries shall have brains enough to get along in the world." Young Slimpouse: "Well, I think I've shown pretty good judgment in selecting a father-in-law, don't you?"

MRS. SPRATT (vigorously shaking her sleeping spouse): "John! John! There's a burglar in the house!" MR. SPRATT (protestingly): "See here, Manda! If, instead of shaking the life out of me, you'd go and shake that burglar you'd be doing some good."

YOUNG TUTTER: "Do you think your mother, Miss Clara, would let you go to the theatre with me without a chaperon?" Miss Pinkerly (doubtfully): "I don't know, Mr. Tutter. She has often said she wouldn't like me to go with any young gentleman I wasn't engaged to."

PERDITA: "Well, Jack and I are to be married at last, and we are so happy!" Penelope: "Did you and Jack have some trouble in getting 'Did you and Jack have some trouble in getting your father's consent?' Perdita: "No; but papa and I had an awful lot of trouble in getting Jack's consent."

SOCIETY.

PRINCE EDWARD ALBERT is now nine months old, and he is getting such a bonny baby boy.

THE Prince of Wales will hold a Levee at St. James's Palace during the first week in April, and he intends to spend the Easter holidays at Sandringham.

THE Queen has already decided and made known to her *entourage* the date of her arrival in Darmstadt. It will be on the 24th of April, the day after St. George's Day.

RUSSIAN journals are still in mourning for the Czar. They will continue to surround their front pages with a border of black until a year shall have elapsed from the date of his death.

IN Italian families children's nurses are considered the most important members of the family household. They are well-paid, petted, finely clothed, and all the other servants are expected to wait upon them.

THE Duchess of York has consented, toward the end of April, to open an exhibition in the Grafton Galleries, entitled "Fair Children," which is to consist of portraits of children by great masters of all countries and of all times.

THE Prince of Wales is to be the host of Colonel Nicholas II., Royal Scots Greys, when his Imperial Majesty comes on his next visit to England, and his Royal Highness is expected to stay with the Czar at the Royal Pavilion, Aldershot, during the elaborate military doings.

THE Queen's Birthday is to be celebrated everywhere except in London on the proper day—Friday, May 24th. The celebration in London is to be on Saturday, the 25th, when the trooping of the colour in St. James's Park will take place, and the usual full dress banquets "to celebrate Her Majesty's Birthday" will be given by the Ministers and the Great Officers of the Household.

THE first Court Ball at Rome was remarkable for the extraordinary magnificence of Queen Marguerite's dress, and it was generally agreed that never had her Majesty looked more beautiful. Queen Marguerite, who danced in the *quadrille d'honneur* with the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador (Baron de Bruck), wore orange-coloured velvet profusely embroidered with gold and silver, with a very long train, and she literally blazed with diamonds, while the famous "ropes of pearls" were round her neck.

THOSE who have seen the young Empress of Russia since her marriage are struck by the change in her appearance. Her Imperial Majesty is described as looking far stronger, and her hair is said to have lost the grave, almost sad, expression which was so much remarked by all who saw her while she was living in Darmstadt. The trying climate, too, does not seem to affect her, although she has always been supposed to be extremely sensitive to cold.

THE Princesses of Wales and the Princesses Victoria and Maud intend to remain in Norfolk until about May 3rd, when they will come up to town for the season. The Princess is not going to Mentone, as the Dowager Empress of Russia will probably remain at St. Petersburg until late in the spring, and then she is expected to proceed to the Caucasus, to visit the Grand Duke George. The Dowager Empress and the Princess of Wales will meet in July at Gmunden, where they are to be the guests of the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, and the three sisters will afterwards go to Denmark for the autumn.

THE Emperor William is anxious to receive the Queen at Potsdam, and he offers to place the Castle of Babelsberg at her disposal; while the programme for her visit would be arranged in accordance with her own wishes only, regardless of precedent. Babelsberg, which was the favourite summer residence of the old Kaiser, is about a mile from Potsdam; it stands in beautiful grounds, which were laid out by Prince Pückler, and has a finely wooded park, which slopes to the river Havel. The Castle, which is in the English-Gothic style, was built between 1835 and 1850; it is most tastefully decorated, and contains a valuable collection of pictures. There are lovely views from the terrace, and the gardens are famous for their fountains.

STATISTICS.

IRELAND has 2,830,000 acres of bog land.

THE screw alone of an Atlantic liner costs about £4,000.

A COLONEL may allow only ten per cent. of the men in his regiment to marry.

OVER 1,000,000 French women were made widows, and over 3,000,000 children were made fatherless, by Napoleon's campaigns.

GEMS.

THE right kind of a man always learns something worth knowing from a mistake.

IN a troubled state we must do as in foul weather on the water—not think to cut directly through, for the boat may be filled, but rise and fall as the waves do, and give way as much as we conveniently can.

TO-DAY'S privileges cannot be enjoyed nor to-day's duties discharged to-morrow. To-morrow may never come. If it does come, it will bring its own privileges and duties—privileges made less and duties made greater by to-day's neglect.

HE who recklessly injures does not thus prove his unselfishness—he simply curtails his powers of doing good; and he who injures his character by welcoming evil influences is thereby inflicting a still greater evil upon the community.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LEMON SHORTCAKE.—Make the pastry part as for a strawberry or similar cake, and spread between the layers a paste composed of the grated rind and juice of a large lemon mixed with a cupful of sugar and one of sweet cream. Serve immediately with lemon flavoured sweet cream as a sauce.

SEAKALE.—Tie the seakale up in bundles and put it into a saucepan of boiling water with a teaspoonful of salt; let it boil for about twenty minutes, or till tender. Drain and serve it on slices of toast with melted butter on a separate dish. Or trim and wash it well, tie in bundles, put it into boiling water into which a handful of salt has been thrown. Boil it twelve minutes, drain it thoroughly, and put it into a saucepan with enough nice gravy to cover it, and stew until tender. It should be sent to the table in the gravy.

STEW WITH TOMATOES—STEWED RABBIT.—Wash and dry a rabbit. Cut it up in joints and rub them all over with flour. Put a good ounce of butter into a stewpan, make it hot. Fry the rabbit all over in it, then add a chopped onion, and fry again; then a little parsley, a teaspoon of tinned tomatoes, a little pepper and salt, and one breakfastcupful of water when it boils. Let all cook for one hour. Take out the rabbit and strain the gravy over it. A teaspoonful of tomatoes added to stewed steak or mutton or veal, greatly improves its flavour and digestibility. Tomato is also very good to stew macaroni in, and a little cheese added makes it good.

SUET-PUDDING WITHOUT SUET.—It is quite as easy to use butter as suet, and the flavour of the dish is much improved thereby. An excellent pudding with fruit may be made with one-fourth of a pound of butter, one-fourth of a pound each of seeded raisins, shredded citron and currants well cleaned. Do not feel satisfied with those that come put up as ready for use, but go over them thoroughly. Add to the prepared fruit half of a cup of sugar, three-fourths of a cup of milk, and a pinch of cloves, allspice and cinnamon. Then stir in flour enough to make a dough that can be rolled with the hands. Butter a mould, put in the pudding, and steam it for three or four hours. Any ordinary sauce may be served with this pudding.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ELEPHANTS' skins are tanned to make carpets. They never wear out, but are expensive.

IN an English print dated 1810 there is a picture of a woman on a tricycle.

THE letters of the word "astronomers" also form the two words "moon starers."

THE ancient Egyptians used wooden rollers to move their huge blocks of stone.

EAGLES always drive away their young as soon as the latter are able to fly well.

IT is said that statues to the late President Carnot are being arranged for in 200 French cities.

THE German house-builders always contrive to leave a small, flat place on the roof of each house for birds to rest and build on.

CATS and several other animals have a false eyelid, which can be drawn over the eyeball, either to cleanse it or to protect it from too strong a light.

PARISIAN restaurant-keepers mix a little honey with their butter. This gives it an agreeable taste and flavour, and makes inferior butter more palatable.

ELECTRICITY has now, it seems, beaten the record of the goldbeater, and can produce a foil of metal from five to ten times thinner than ordinary gold leaf.

PLATINUM has been drawn into smooth wire so fine that it could not be distinguished by the naked eye, even when stretched across a piece of white cardboard.

To prevent the possibility of contagious diseases spreading through the use of the telephone the Paris faculty of medicine recommends the use of a specially prepared antiseptic paper.

THE mushroom's life is measured by hours, but it flourishes long enough for an insect to hang its egg on the edge of the umbrella, and for the egg to become an insect ready to colonise the next mushroom that pushes up.

AT a recent congress in India, where nine languages were spoken by delegates, the discussions were carried on in English. A proposition has been brought forward lately to make English the missionary language of the world.

FROST bells are tolled in some districts of France when frost is threatened. Immediately the inhabitants place quantities of tar between the rows of vines. The tar is lighted, and volumes of dense smoke arise, thus protecting the vines.

FROM the Riviera there arrive every morning about 500 packages of freshly-plucked violets, narcissus, jonquils, anemones, roses, and other flowers. Most of the consignments remain in London, but some of them proceed to Manchester, Liverpool, and even across the Irish Channel before being opened. The other day flowers arrived from as far off as Australia, with all the appearance of recent culling, embedded in solid blocks of ice. The drawback of these flowers, however, is that the ice, which is necessary to their lasting beauty, can hardly be worn in the button-hole or carried in a bouquet.

DIAMOND powder and chips, and even the finest dust, are of great value in the mechanical arts. Brazilian diamonds are now put to a novel and interesting use. A thin disk of steel, seven feet in diameter, has spaces at intervals of about one and one-half inches. These spaces are filled in with pieces of steel that exactly fit, and into these are set the diamonds fixed in countersunk screw-heads. They are arranged in groups of eight, and are so placed that they do not follow one exactly after the other in the cut, but each line takes its own course. This circular saw is used for cutting up blocks of stone, and so efficient is it that in less than two and one half years it has cut out four hundred and twenty thousand square feet of stone, at a cost of a trifle less than two cents a square foot. In this time it has been necessary to renew twenty of the teeth, the average cost of which has been about two dollars per tooth.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

W. A.—Consult a lawyer.

C. W.—Consult the London Directory.

ERIC.—A bookseller may be able to tell you.

GWYNETH.—June 17th, 1888, came on a Sunday.

H. L.—Bets cannot be recovered by legal process.

INQUIRER.—The name is not given in the Peerage.

P. S.—The customary committal is for forty days.

KITTY.—Steaming a stale loaf of bread will freshen it.

D. F.—It is not wise to fall to consult a doctor when anything is supposed to be wrong with the heart.

ROGER.—The only real drawback is the defective eye-sight.

ANXIOUS.—We can give no assistance in missing word competitions.

IGNORAMUS.—Bolt-upright means perfectly upright, perpendicular.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—It is against our rule to recommend any particular newspaper.

R. C.—We believe the method you ask for is a patent or trade secret.

CONSTANT READER.—Any person may offer himself as a candidate for the School Board.

CURIOS.—The letters are—Fellow of the Scientific Society, London.

LEONARD.—We are not aware of any exploring parties now being organised in Britain.

OLD READER.—The Agent-General for the Cape is at 112, Victoria-street, London, S.W.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—A married woman may make a will disposing of her own separate property.

TROUBLED LYSER.—A weak solution of powdered borax and water is generally used to remove dandruff.

E. H.—Both the Assyrians and Egyptians drove and rode horses at a very early date.

DUBIOUS.—Hair dyes frequently injure the eyes and health of those who use them.

WORKING.—Being produced by a burn the discolouration cannot be removed.

L. D.—You can get either of them at a painter's shop, or at an oil and colour shop.

F. J. B.—Albert is a German name—Edward purely English.

ONE IN DISTRESS.—The case is a strange one; you had better ask a lawyer to advise you upon it.

INQUIRITIVE.—The division of the clock dial into sixty minutes is believed to have originated in Babylon.

ETIQUETTE.—No one to whom a wedding-card has not been sent need call upon a newly married couple.

MOLLY.—A little lemon juice squeezed into the water in which rice is boiled keeps the grains separate.

JAMIE.—Needlework should be ironed on the wrong side on a piece of flannel, and it should be kept long enough under the iron to thoroughly dry it.

REGULAR READER.—Physicians declare that the most nutritious article of diet is butter, and that bacon comes next.

UNOPPORTUNISTIC.—A girl comes of age at twenty-one. Until then the parents can refuse their consent to her marriage.

K. Y.—You cannot apply the term "patent" to an article until the patent has been sealed and thereby completed.

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—A cat is carried on board ship to catch the rats, which are often numerous enough to be actually dangerous to the crew.

JACKO.—The object is to get one of sufficient power. There are a number of makers of field glasses all equally good.

J. K.—Only the arms of prisoners capitally convicted are plumed, and then only a few minutes before execution.

GERARD.—The white of the egg is almost pure albumen. The yolk of the egg is also albumen, but mixed with a yellow oil which colours it.

IN TROUBLE.—The parents of the adopted child can at any time reclaim the custody of the child. No agreement not to do so would be binding.

SHELIA.—You should use Indian ink with a very little gum arabic, and for red, vermilion with the very least little touch of lake white and gum arabic.

WILLIE.—It is for the executor to see that the terms of the will are carried out, and that all claims against the estate are legally satisfied.

NORRIS.—The last persons beheaded in London were the noblemen who suffered on Tower Hill for their share in the civil war of 1745.

HOUSEWIFE.—A chamois stove will dry the walls quickly if well maintained, but it should never be used unless there is free ventilation.

B. C.—It is a question of circumstances, and these we cannot understand without personal explanations, so that perhaps it would be your wisest course to consult a lawyer of good standing.

A. K. T.—There are no stamps necessary upon a will, nor need you have witnesses' names to the document if you write it altogether yourself.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—He has a good cause of action against the proprietor, and a jury would be certain to give him proper damages.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—It would be the brother's duty to write the first letter, unless it was understood that the lady should write to him announcing her safe arrival home.

EDINA.—It was in the spring of 1431 that Joan of Arc was made a prisoner and taken to Rouen, France, where she was burned. Her ashes were thrown into the Seine.

NATHANIEL.—Write to the Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W., for date of next examination and subjects to be set to candidates; printed form is sent in answer gratis.

PUZZLED.—A stigmatic means a malformation of the lens of the eye—the part that takes the picture of what the individual is looking at—caused it may be by accident, or produced at birth.

SEN ROSA.—Probably the best thing you could do would be to wash it with plenty of good carbolic soap and water; either that or get disinfecting carbolic powder and rub it well into the hair.

TWO CHIDY GIRLS.—Boys are not especially attracted to wild and rude girls. Gentlemanly boys are not likely to be interested in girls whose manners and habits are so unlike their own.

RATHER DOUBTFUL.—It is a rather questionable practice, unless the young men are relatives or the ladies are engaged to them. The indiscriminate exchange of gifts is always bad form.

THE BLUE AND THE BLACK.

Here's a health to the lass with the merry black eyes!
Here's a health to the lad with the blue ones!
Here's a bumper to love as it sparkles and flies!
And here's joy to the hearts that are true ones!
Yes, joy to the hearts that are tender and true,
With a passion that nothing can smother,
To the eyes of the one that are pensive and blue
And the merry black eyes of the other!

Mind this now, my lad, with the sweet blue eyes of blue
That whatever the graces invite you,
There's nothing for you in this world that will do
But a pair of black eyes, to delight you.
And mind, my gay lass, with the dear eyes of black,
In a pair of blue eyes to discover
That pure light of affection you never should lack,
And you'll always be true to your lover!

Long, long shall your eyes sparkle back with a kiss
To the eyes that live but to behold you!
Long, long shall the magic of mutual bliss
In a heaven of rapture enfold you!
And forever to you shall that singer be wise
Whose sweet thought is the truest of true ones,
That the answering lustre of merry black eyes
Is the life of a pair of true blue ones.

W. W.

WAVERER.—It is neither dishonest nor deceitful to use an assumed name, unless it is done for the purpose of misleading or defrauding. It is not uncommon for many professional persons to make use of such names.

J. M. C.—It is necessary to hunt through the birth and marriage registers of the parish in which you were born, tracing back one relative after another until you are at the limit of information on the subject.

SOPHIE.—Any broken plaster of Paris figures may be mended with finely powdered plaster of Paris made into a cream with water. Colouring matter may easily be added, if necessary, to conceal the fracture.

SUFFERER.—Nervous troubles are the most difficult diseases to understand and treat, the causes are so diverse and in many cases so obscure. By all means consult a competent physician.

ONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.—The definition of a Conservative given by "Chambers's Etymological Dictionary" is one who desires to preserve the institutions of his country until they can be changed with certainty for the better.

JOSEPH.—You should go to the States instead of the colonies; the field there for one in your line is wider, and men work under advantages, both of wages and workshop comfort, such as are rarely experienced in this country.

V. M.—If the maker can show that the injury done to the instrument was by careless usage, then undoubtedly you are liable in payment of the repairs; if, again, you could show that the construction was faulty, the maker is liable.

LOO.—To preserve the natural heat of the feet it is suggested to wear two pairs of stockings of different fabrics, one pair of silk or cotton, the other of wool. While wearing the stockings, be sure to keep the feet in the most cleanly condition.

MISERABLE ONE.—You may effectually check the progress of decay in your teeth by applying to a respectable dentist and having them stopped—a process which need give you no pain, and will render the teeth fit for the purpose of mastication.

INSURED WIFE.—A wife should endeavour to be as attractive to her husband when engaged in her household duties as when arrayed for a full-dress party. To have what are termed "company manners" on only formal occasions is to set a poor example for your children to follow, and certainly does not elevate you in their estimation in any respect. Be as uniform as possible in your treatment of everyone beneath your own roof and you will soon come to realize how much better it is to be so than to bestow all your good nature upon only society acquaintances.

A WOULD-BE ACTRESS.—The life of an actress is a hard one at best. Few histrionic aspirants achieve great success. They may aim to be "stars," but they rarely become the shining lights they start out to be. How overgifted in mind or person, they have so many obstacles to encounter, so many trials to endure, so many disappointments to meet, and so many impediments to overcome that before they have been long in the public eye they are apt to get weary of their profession and wish they had never embarked in it. Try some other avocation.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—No one has a right to sell diseased margarine without giving it its proper name. It makes no difference whether the seller is the keeper of a hotel or restaurant, the proprietor of a boarding-house or the grocer who dispenses it over his counter, the law distinctly says he has no right to sell this compound under other than its correct name. The hotel-keeper is just as certainly selling it as the grocer, and is legally just as liable to the punishment, and, in addition, is morally responsible for practising fraud upon unsuspecting persons.

GRACE.—Six ounces of flour, six ounces of sugar, six eggs, eight ounces of preserved ginger, a pint of cream, six ounces of butter, a little salt. Put the cream, sugar, butter, and salt into a stewpan on the fire, and as soon as these begin to simmer, take off the stewpan, throw in the flour, and stir the whole together quickly; then put this paste back again on the fire, and continue stirring it for about five minutes; it must then be withdrawn, and the six eggs mixed in gradually with it. The ginger, cut into small pieces, must now be added to the preparation, which must then be poured into the mould, previously spread with butter. Steam it for an hour and a half, and when done dish up the pudding with a custard sauce made with the syrup from the ginger.

MARGERY.—Six ounces flour, two ounces salt, half teaspoon baking powder, pinch of oil, one and a half round apples, some sugar. Pare the apples and cut them in bits, put them in a pan with two tablespoons water and two of sugar, let them stew a little and turn them out to cool; then make a paste with the flour, salt, and sugar, the baking powder, salt, and as much water as is necessary. Take a bit off for a lid, and roll the remainder into a round some; grease the inside of a pudding bowl, and line it with the paste neatly; put in the stewed apples, then turn in the edges of the paste and wet them; roll the lid large enough to do it on, cover the bowl with a greased paper, and put the dumpling in a pan with a little boiling water and a close lid to steam for one hour.

GLADYR.—Every theatre has its own manager. There are, in addition, numbers of theatrical agencies, some good, but more very bad indeed. In the first place, to have the first conditions of success one must have either talent, beauty or untiring industry, and these are valuable sometimes in the order named, but more often enumerating them from last to first. There is nothing that will command attention so quickly as beauty, and nothing that will hold it like diligence and application. One need not necessarily go to a dramatic school, but one must be taught in order to know how to do the simplest stage business properly. Talent and genius are great things in matters theatrical, but more talent and genius are wasted by lack of earnestness than can be well believe without wide observation. There are several roads to success by way of the stage. One may go into the business as an apprentice and grow up in it, as it were, which is by far the surest way, even though it is the slowest, or the aspirant may have a gift, a positive instinct for doing things—and this is extremely rare—or with unlimited means at command may command attention of some manager may be secured when everything in that department is clear sailing. Perhaps the best way to go about the matter is to address a letter to the manager of any theatre where the plays please you.

THE LONDON READER. Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all Booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 408, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free. Eightpence. Also Vol. LXIII, bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX TO VOL. LXIII. is Now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 324, Strand, W.C.

††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 324, Strand, by G. F. CORNFORD; and printed by WOODWARD & LINDER, 70 to 75, Long Acre, W.C.

DR. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE.

THE ORIGINAL AND ONLY GENUINE.

CHLORODYNE is admitted by the Profession to be the most wonderful and valuable remedy ever discovered.
 CHLORODYNE is the best remedy known for COUGHS, CONSUMPTION, BRONCHITIS, ASTHMA.
 CHLORODYNE effectually checks and arrests those too often fatal diseases—DIPHTHERIA, FEVER, CROUP, AGUE.
 CHLORODYNE acts like a charm in Diarrhoea, and is the only specific in CHOLERA and DYSENTERY.
 CHLORODYNE effectually cuts short all attacks of EPILEPSY, HYSTERIA, PALPITATION, and SPASMS.
 CHLORODYNE is the only palliative in NEURALGIA, RHEUMATISM, GOUT, CANCER, TOOTHACHE, MENINGITIS, &c.



It is admitted by the Profession to be the most wonderful and valuable remedy ever discovered.

CAUTION—BEWARE OF PIRACY AND IMITATION.

Sold in Bottles at 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., and 4s. 6d. None Genuine without the words "Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE," on the Government Stamp. Overwhelming Medical Testimony accompanies each Bottle. **SOLE MANUFACTURER—**

J. T. DAVENPORT, 33, Gt. Russell St., Bloomsbury, London.

HOLLOWAY'S PILLS AND OINTMENT.

THE BEST MEDICINES FOR FAMILY USE.

THE PILLS

Purify the Blood, correct all Disorders of the internal organs
 And are Invaluable in all Complaints incidental to Females.

THE OINTMENT

the most reliable Remedy for Chest and Throat Affections, Gout, Rheumatism, Stiff Joints, Old Wounds, Sores, Ulcers, and all Skin Diseases.

Manufactured only at 78, New Oxford Street, London,
 And sold by all Medicine Vendors throughout the World.

S.B.—Advice gratis, at the above address, daily, between the hours of 11 and 4, or by letter.



Exquisite Models. Perfect Fit. Guaranteed Wear.

THE Y & N PATENT DIAGONAL SEAM CORSETS,

PATENTED IN ENGLAND AND OF THE CONTINENT.

Will not split in the Seams, nor tear in the Fabric.
 Made in White, Black, and all the Fashionable Colours and Shades in Italian Cloth, Satin, and Coutil; also in the New Sanitary Woolen Cloth, 4s. 11d., 6s. 11d., 8s. 11d., 7s. 11d. per pair and upwards.

"Admirably modelled—exquisitely neat and strong."
 —Queen.

THREE GOLD MEDALS

Sold by the principal Drapers and Ladies Outfitters in the United Kingdom and Colonies.



Quickly correct all irregularities, remove all obstructions, and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent with the sex.

Boxes 1s. 1½d. & 2s. 9d. (the latter contains three times the quantity) of all Chemists. Sent anywhere on receipt of 15 or 34 stamps by the maker, E. T. TOWLE, Chemist, Nottingham.

Beware of Imitations injurious & worthless!

RIISING SUN STOVE POLISH.

EASIEST, QUICKEST, CHEAPEST, & BEST BLACKLEAD IN THE WORLD.

N.B.—In Half the Time and with Half the Labour you can produce more polish with Two Penny Packets of the "Rising Sun" than with Half-a-dozen Penny Packets of ordinary Blacklead.

RISIN' SUN LIQUID METAL POLISH

Bottles 6d., 1s., and 2s. 6d.

Gives to Metal Articles of every Description (Gold, Silver, Copper, Brass, Steel, &c., also Glass), a Beautiful Soft Brilliant Polish, which lasts Six Times as Long Without Tarnishing as other kinds.

MACK'S DOUBLE STARCH.

Contains the Very Best Starch Borax, Gum, Wax, &c., as well as the STARCH GLOSS. Saves Time, Labour, and Uncertainty, as in it are combined, in their PROPER PROPORTIONS, all ingredients necessary to produce BEAUTIFUL WHITE GLOSSY LINEN. Requires no addition and no preparation.

CHANCELLOR'S PLATE POWDER,

EASIEST, QUICKEST, CHEAPEST, AND BEST.

In 3d. Boxes.

Samples of the above Four articles post free for 8 stamps, or of any One for 2 stamps (to cover postage). Ask your Grocer to get them for you.

G. CHANCELLOR & CO., LONDON, E.C.

SILEX LENS, THE NEW AID TO SEEING.



Do you suffer from HEADACHE, NEURALGIA, PAINS or DIZZINESS? If so send to the

NATIONAL SILEX OPTICAL CO.,

Chief Office: 138, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

FOR THEIR HOME TESTS. POST-FREE.

The most comfortable SPECTACLES or FOLDERS ever known.

FROM 1s. 6d. PER PAIR.

CAN BE SENT TO ANY PART OF THE WORLD.

WORTH A GUINEA A BOX.

BEECHAM'S PILLS.

FOR ALL

Bilious and Nervous Disorders, such as
Sick Headache, Constipation,
Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,
Disordered Liver, and
Female Ailments.



THE SALE IS NOW SIX MILLION BOXES PER ANNUM.

Prepared only by the Proprietor, **THOMAS BEECHAM**, St. Helen's, Lancashire.
 Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere, in Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each.
 Full directions with each Box.

BEECHAM'S TOOTH PASTE

Will recommend itself; it is Efficacious, Economical, Cleanses the Teeth, Removes Tartar, Prevents Decay, and is a Pleasant and Reliable Dentifrice.

In Collapsible Tubes.—Of all Druggists, or from the Proprietor for One Shilling, Postage Paid.

SULPHOLINE Bottles Sold Everywhere.
LOTION

The Cure for Skin Diseases, Eruptions, Blotches, Eczema, Acne, Disfigurements. Makes the Skin Clear, Smooth, Supple, Healthy.

PEPPER'S 2s. 6d.
 SOLD EVERYWHERE.
QUININE AND IRON TONIC

GREAT BODILY STRENGTH!
 GREAT NERVE STRENGTH!
 GREAT MENTAL STRENGTH!
 GREAT DIGESTIVE STRENGTH!

Promotes Appetite, Cures Dyspepsia, Hysteria, Nervous Complaints, &c.

NEAVE'S
FOOD

FOR INFANTS AND INVALIDS.

NEAVE'S
FOOD.

A PURE CEREAL PREPARATION.

BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

EPPS'S

GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.

COCOA

BOILING WATER OR MILK.

WHEN WASHING CLOTHES
 USE ONLY

Reckitt's Blue.

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

PART 405. VOL. LXIV.—MAY, 1895.

CONTENTS.

SERIAL STORIES.

	PAGE
BITTER SWEET	553, 589, 613, 9
BRENDA'S GUARDIAN	1
HELEN'S DILEMMA	556, 592
LEILA VANE'S BURDEN	561, 585, 609
STRAYED AWAY	616, 4

NOVELETTES.

A MAIDEN FAIR	565
A MISSING LETTER	601
CAPTAIN HILLYARD'S ADVENTURE	13
HESTER'S LOVERS	577

SHORT STORIES.

A RIVAL'S TREACHERY	559
CATHLEEN'S FAIRY	21
DESTINY	619

SHORT STORIES—Continued.

	PAGE
FANNIE'S ENGAGEMENT RING	621
THE AVENGER	596

VARIETIES.

POETRY	576, 600, 624, 24
FACETIE	574, 598, 622, 22
SOCIETY	575, 599, 623, 23
STATISTICS	575, 599, 623, 23
GEMS	575, 599, 623, 23
HOUSEHOLD TREASURES	575, 599, 623, 23
MISCELLANEOUS	575, 599, 623, 23
NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS	576, 600, 624, 24

PRICE SIXPENCE.

LONDON:

PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICE, 334, STRAND,
AND OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

SUNLIGHT

SOAP

WRAPPER COMPETITION.

BOOK PRIZES

during 1895.

Full Particulars round each
Tablet of
SUNLIGHT SOAP.

A LONG LIST of CHOICE BOOKS to SELECT FROM.

NOTE-IMPORTANT.
 Clergymen, Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses, Sunday-school Superintendents and Teachers, may form "Book Clubs" amongst their Parishioners, Congregations, and Scholars, and by collecting Sunlight Soap Wrappers soon have a valuable Library.

LEVER BROS., Ltd., Port Sunlight, Nr. Birkenhead.

Given Away! Re-Vulcanized Gold Medal Rubber Stamps.

Your name, your Monogram, bottle of Endorsing Ink, 2 Pads, Box and Brush for 9d., post free; with Marking Ink or Pencil, 1s. 3d. Nickel Silver Pen and Pencil Case, with Name Stamp, 6d.

Nickel Silver Name and Address Stamp, 9d. Watch Case, beautifully chased, with Name and Address Stamp, 1s.; and every other description of Rubber Stamps, Endorsing and Indelible Inks, Stencils, Hand-printing appliances, &c., at half the usual price. Send for List of hundred Illustrations. Agents wanted.—Address to **Crystal Palace (John Bond's Daughter's Gold Medal Marking Ink Works, 75, Southgate Road, London, N.**

Caution.—The Original and Genuine Ink Label has the Trade Mark, "Crystal Palace."

Linen Lasts Longer.

Your Clothes delightfully fresh and sweet if soaked and washed with

HUDSON'S EXTRACT OF SOAP

OR

HUDSON'S DRY SOAP.

Shirt Cuffs will not be frayed or Collars jagged if Hudson's is always used.

OTTEY'S UNLABELLED STRONG FEMALE PILLS.

These noted Pills always remove all obstructions, arising from any cause whatever, where Steel and Pennyroyal Pills fail. Invaluable to married women. Post-free under cover, for 14 and 33 stamps from **THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, Burton-on-Trent.**

[Please mention paper.]

WHELPTON'S PILLS

Should always be kept at hand

WHELPTON'S PILLS
Have enjoyed 50 Years' Success

WHELPTON'S PILLS
The Best General Family Medicine

WHELPTON'S PILLS
Cure Headache at Once

WHELPTON'S PILLS
Set your Liver in Order

WHELPTON'S PILLS
Will keep good in all Climates

WHELPTON'S STOMACH PILLS
The Best Dinner Pills

WHELPTON'S OINTMENT
Cures Eczema

WHELPTON'S OINTMENT
Heals Cuts, Burns, etc., like Magic.

Ask for **WHELPTON'S PILLS** & see that you get them

Sold by all Chemists, 7½d., 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. per box,
Or of the Proprietors,

**G. WHELPTON & SON, 3, Crane Court, Fleet Street,
London, E.C.**

Free by Post in the United Kingdom for 8, 14, or 33 Stamps.